

introduction

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The image of Christianity in America is increasingly associated with narrow, right-wing partisanship and vicious ideological attacks on the poor, liberals, women, homosexuals, immigrants, and others—all in the guise of reclaiming America's "godly heritage."

But must the religious be "Right"? Too many people forget the American religious community's historic role in the abolition of slavery, the struggle for civil rights, anti-war and nuclear disarmament efforts, and human rights support around the world. Only recently has Christian political activity in the United States become motivated more by nationalistic self-righteousness than by compassion for the poor.

After organizing at the local level for a number of years, the Religious Right in 1994 was able to claim responsibility for the Republican takeover of Congress and the passage of their "Contract With America." Since then the halls of the Capitol have been open to national organizations such as the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, and others pressing a conservative agenda. Consistently the media have focused on this movement as if it were the sole Christian political expression.

Yet the Religious Right isn't the only voice entering the public debate on issues of faith and politics. The Call to Renewal, which Sojourners is helping to organize, is a biblical, faith-based organization working to reclaim the term "evangelical" from its right-wing Republican portrayal—not just for the sake of the evangelicals among them, but for all Christians who care about the lasting integrity of the body of Christ. As its statement, "The Cry for Renewal" (see page 42) points out, what is "at stake is not just politics, but the meaning of faith itself."

WHILE ASSERTING THE right for all people of faith to bring their values into the political arena, it has become increasingly clear that the divisive, intolerant, and partisan debates that now characterize politics do little to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. While many of the values of the Christian Right parallel those of other Christians, we must work together to develop approaches to policy that are biblical, compassionate, and just. A return to the biblical roots from which political work extends is the best way to separate the theological wheat from the political chaff.

Recovering the Evangel is designed to help individuals and congregations begin a process of renewal themselves by provid-

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ing information on the politics and theology of the Religious Right and resources for a new vision of faith and politics. It contains four study sessions that examine some of the characteristics of the current dialogue of faith and politics, the theological underpinnings that ground our politics, ways this new faith-based politics might approach critical issues in our national life, and finally, methods for putting this vision into action. To help facilitate discussion, study questions are included at the end of the articles.

Jesus warned his followers to "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). *Recovering the Evangel* urges Christians to set aside their own political agendas and examine the motivations of their action anew in the light of the gospel. As the political battle heats up in America, it is increasingly important for all communions to re-examine the forces on the Right and the Left that attempt to use the church for narrow purposes. As people of faith, we undertake this process of renewal in hope that a new political vision for America—based on justice, compassion, and righteousness, rather than on traditional categories of Left and Right—will come abundantly to life.

—The Editors

To order more copies of this resource, or for additional information on the *Call to Renewal*, contact Sojourners, 2401 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009; (202) 328-8842. Bulk rates for *Recovering the Evangel* are available.

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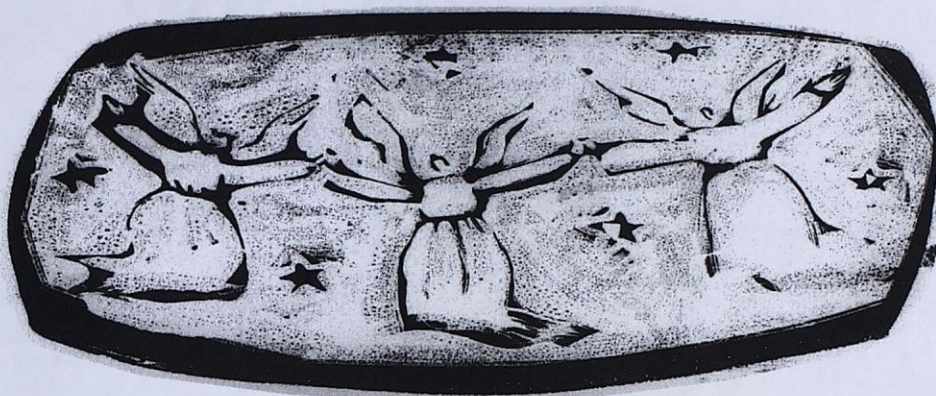
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WHO SPEAKS FOR GOD?

An alternative to the Religious Right.

BY JIM WALLIS

Who speaks for God today? The Religious Right would have us believe that it does. The media have been very cooperative, giving right-wing fundamentalists most of the coverage when issues concerning politics and religion come up. And religion and politics come up all the time these days.

For several years now, the Religious Right has virtually controlled the national discussion of politics and morality with the help of the media, who have virtually ignored alternative voices. And with all its money, the Religious Right literally has been able to buy its own microphones and broadcast its message around the world.

The time has come to challenge the Religious Right and offer a deeper perspective. A clear, visible, public alternative is vitally needed today—one that lifts up another vision of the relationship between faith and politics.

Among many sectors of the church's life, a new conversation is taking place. Dissenting evangelical voices seek a biblical approach to politics, not the ideological agenda being advanced by the Religious Right. Strong Catholic voices assert their own church's social teachings as a vital alternative to the Religious Right and the secular Left. Many African-American, Latino, Asian, and Native American church voices combine personal and family values with a commitment to social justice that leads them to embrace neither the liberal nor the conservative program. New voices from all the Protestant churches feel represented neither by old religious liberalism nor Religious Right fundamentalism.

Together, we proclaim an evangelical, biblical, and catholic faith that must address a nation in crisis; and we will not be dismissed as "liberals" or "secular humanists" as the Religious Right always characterizes those who disagree with it. We do not challenge the Religious Right's "right" to bring its religious values into the public square as some political liberals have.

On the contrary, our impoverished political process needs the moral direction and energy that spiritual and

religious values can contribute to the public debate. Separation of church and state rightly prevents the official establishment of any religion but does not and must not prohibit the positive influence of religious communities on the nation's moral and political climate.

The question is not whether religious faith should make a political contribution, but how. If religious values are to influence the public arena, they ought to make our political discourse more honest, moral, civil, and spiritually sensitive, especially to those without the voice and power to be fairly represented.

That is where the Religious Right has failed. Since the 1980s, the powerful influence of the Religious Right has been an important factor in making our political debate even *more* divisive, polarized, and less sensitive to the poor and dispossessed.

Our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among people. All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action.

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

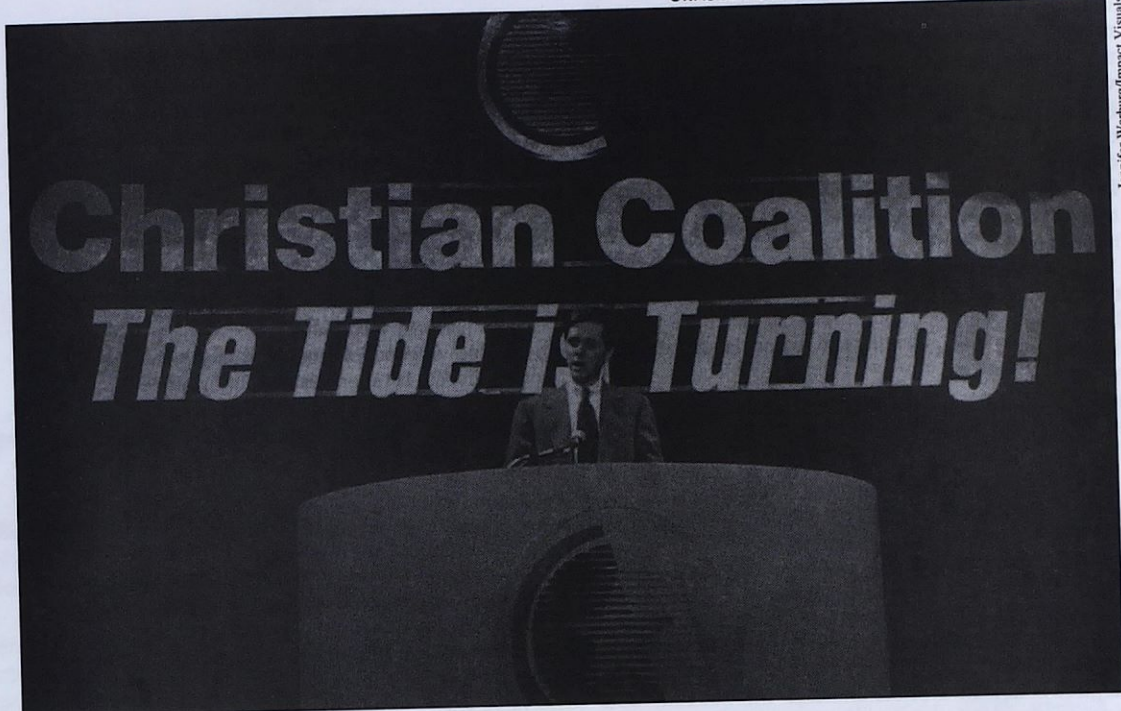
AT STAKE IS NOT just politics, but the meaning of faith itself. It is time to challenge the aggressive right-wing litmus test that has distorted the independent moral conscience that faith can bring to politics. Many committed Christians are dismayed by those who would undermine the integrity of religious conviction that does not conform to a narrow ideological agenda. And prophetic religion is subverted when wealth and power are extolled rather than held accountable; when the gospel message is turned upside-down to bring more comfort to those on the top of society than to those at the bottom.

Regrettably, the Religious Right has claimed the evangelical faith and an almost exclusive right to define it by its political agenda. But, most evangelical Christians are not members of the Religious Right, despite the media-created perception of an evangelical right-wing juggernaut. Even the word "evangelical" has become so identified with a particular political and cultural militancy that many evangelical Christians now hesitate to identify themselves as such.

"Evangelical" used to be a good word. It means a biblically rooted and Jesus-centered faith, and it comes from the word "evangel"—meaning "good news." Jesus

Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed.

Jennifer Warburg/Impact Visuals



himself used the word to announce the meaning of his coming. There, standing in the temple in the little town of Nazareth, he quoted Isaiah's ancient prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news [the evangel] to the poor...."

The Religious Right preaches a politics that is more nationalist than truly evangelical. Listening to its leaders' words and agenda, one hears little about Jesus at all. Their political preference for wealth, power, and military might flies in the face of a gospel that was intended to be good news to the poor and was preached by an itinerant Jewish rabbi who said that it was the peacemakers who would be blessed.

One wonders whether the Religious Right even knows its own history. In the last century, evangelical Christians were leaders in the abolitionist movement against slavery, were tireless advocates of the poor and oppressed, and were in the forefront of the struggle for women's rights. Is today's Religious Right agenda good news to the poor, women, and disadvantaged racial communities?

The evangelical Christian movement has been hijacked. Evangelical Christianity has been commandeered by a combination of fundamentalist preachers and right-wing political operatives who recognized their common cause and the power to be gained by taking over the evangelical label. They have now effectively done so in the perception of the nation.

True evangelical faith focuses on the moral values that must be recovered to heal the torn political fabric; ideological faith would rend the fabric further in the pursuit of power. Evangelical faith tries to find common ground between warring factions by taking the public discourse to higher ground; ideological faith fuels the

rhetoric of "us and them" and breeds a climate for hate and even violence. Evangelical faith holds up the virtues of compassion and community; ideological faith appeals to personal and group self-interest. Evangelical faith understands our identity as the children of God as a call to humility and reconciliation rather than the basis for attacking those who are less righteous.

WHO WILL ARTICULATE a political vision that seeks common ground between diverse people with legitimate concerns? The politics of division will only take us lower and lower. We need a politics of values and vision today, one that takes seriously both personal and social transformation.

Despite public cynicism, a deep longing exists in the land for rediscovering the moral heart of our public debate. Many Americans now believe the crisis we face is a spiritual one, and deeper than politics as usual. It's the "healing of the nation," as envisioned by the biblical prophets, that we most need today, and the "soul" of politics that we must recover. While the liberals and conservatives carry on arguments that seem more and more irrelevant and relentlessly attack each other, our children are being shot in the streets.

Our times cry out for renewed political vision. And vision depends upon spirited values. But if politics will be renewed more by moral values than by partisan warfare, the religious community must play a more positive role. The language of morality and faith is absolutely essential to political discourse. Because the crisis we face is spiritual, it must be addressed by solutions that address the "spirit" of the times that often lies beneath our political and economic problems.

The almost total identification of the Religious Right

with the new conservative political rulers in Washington, D.C., is merely the latest dangerous liaison of religion with political power. Such faith is clearly more ideological than truly evangelical. With the ascendancy and influence of the Christian Right in the Republican Party, the religious critique of power has been replaced with the religious competition for power.

Likewise, the continuing identification of religious liberalism with political liberalism and the Democratic Party has demonstrated a public witness without either moral imagination or prophetic integrity. Liberal religious leaders have sought access and influence with those in power no less than their Religious Right counterparts. Neither right-wing religious nationalism nor left-wing religious lobbying will serve us at this critical historical juncture.

RELIGIOUS FAITH MUST NOT become another casualty of the culture wars. Indeed, religious communities should be the ones calling for a cease-fire. The ideological polarization of the churches will not contribute to the spiritual discernment of politics the country most needs. Name calling is no substitute for real and prayerful dialogue between different constituencies with conflicting priorities.

Today the body politic is buffeted by polarized extremes. Instead of helping a politically war-weary public find common concerns and values, the religious community, on both sides, has often given sanction to the perpetuation of tragic divisions. Many Christians refuse the false choices between personal responsibility or social justice, between good values or good jobs, between strong families or strong neighborhoods, between sexual morality or civil rights for homosexuals, between the sacredness of life or the rights of women, between fighting cultural corrosion or battling racial and economic injustice.

Many of us care deeply about moral values and the breakdown of family life. We feel the erosion of personal responsibility and character in our neighborhoods and nation. But that doesn't lead us into the arms of the Religious Right. On the contrary. We believe that social responsibility is also at the heart of our biblical traditions, that racism and sexism are also sins, and that the best test of a nation's righteousness is not its gross national product and military firepower but, according to the prophets, how it treats the poorest and most vulnerable.

It is time to call ourselves and our churches back to a biblical focus that transcends the Left and the Right. Christians should carefully consider each social and political issue, diligently apply the values of faith, and be willing to break out of traditional political categories. By seeking the biblical virtues of justice and righteousness, the Christian community could help a cynical pub-

In reality, theology has never really been apolitical. There has always been either a hidden or overt politics in every theological system. Its message is either one that sanctions the existing system or calls for disaffiliation from it in the name of an alternative reality.

—ROSEMARY RADFORD
RUETHER

lic find new political ground.

The American people are disgusted with politics as usual and hungry for political vision with spiritual values that transcends the old and failed categories that still imprison public discourse and stifle our creativity. The religious community could help lead that discussion and action toward new political alternatives. Toward that end, we need a new dialogue with all sectors of the religious community.

The leaders of the Religious Right have dominated long enough. They have one perspective and deserve to be heard. But the issues of political morality are too important to be left only to one voice. Other visions of faith and politics exist in the land.

Politicized religion is no substitute for prophetic faith. A growing number of American Christians are feeling a fresh commitment to apply spiritual values to the vexing questions of our public life and, where necessary, to offer a Christian alternative to the Religious Right. Let the other voices be heard. ■

JJIM WALLIS is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners*.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Do you think the church has a responsibility to be involved in the political realm? Do individual Christians share this responsibility? For a church active in the world, is it appropriate to hold partisan positions or is it a fundamental problem? Is it possible for Christians to contribute a strong voice to the political arena without becoming partisan or ideological?

Wallis believes that religious faith should make a political contribution, but that its method is significant. How might your faith community contribute to political discourse and governance in this country? What are some of your basic principles and ideals? In a country where wealth and power are important, what things are important to you in building a political vision that is consistent with faith and conscience?

Wallis argues that the media cover the Religious Right as the exclusive voice of Christians. Why might this be so? Do you think the Christian Coalition portrays itself as the exclusive voice of Christianity? If yes, how do the media contribute to this portrayal?

How important is it to your spiritual integrity to "articulate the truth," as Wallis says?

THE PROMISE OF GOD'S REIGN

The church's role in the world's future.

BY WESLEY GRANBERG-MICHAELSON

The church today is in the midst of an intense struggle to understand its role in the future of the world. Such a challenge, of course, is as old as the people of God. But new historical circumstances shape the nature of the church's current attempts to fashion a theology of the future.

On the one hand, liberation theology and "theologies of hope" have thrust the issue of history's future movement before the church with a new urgency and passion. The God who delivers and liberates opens the future to new possibilities. In the midst of the struggle by the poor and oppressed for justice, the signs of this new future can be found. And it comes within history—not at its end. Biblical passages about judgment announce God's condemnation of unjust and oppressive forces in the world, which are to be overthrown as history moves toward God's kingdom. Versions of these themes have merged among many Christians committed to the biblical call for social justice.

At the other extreme, millions of Christians expect injustice, ecological deterioration, and the probability of nuclear war to get worse, and believe this is what the Bible teaches. In fact, headlines proclaiming imminent disasters are welcomed as signs that the world is closer to its end, and to the second coming of Christ. The dawning of God's new creation, according to this view, lies nowhere within this history, but will come only after Christ's return initiates a new beginning.

The popularity of these views, particularly among many evangelical Christians, is demonstrated by the sale of millions of copies of books such as Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth* and by the local audiences drawn to television evangelists who proclaim a theology of "end times."

TRADITIONALLY, A MAJORITY of evangelicals in this century have held such a view concerning the return of Christ, which is called premillennialism. In general,

Christianity teaches that human history as we know it will culminate and end with the return, or second coming, of Christ and the final judgment. Premillennialists, however, believe that upon Christ's return, he will inaugurate a rule of peace and righteousness on earth for a thousand years—the millennium. After that, the final judgment will be executed, with eternal life or death for all. Revelation 20:1-6 is the key biblical passage on which this belief rests.

Until this time, all the world will continue on an escalating downward spiral, gaining momentum as evil reaches a cosmic crescendo. Wars, earthquakes, natural disasters, and famine are all signs confirming, ironically, that history is moving according to God's plan, and bringing the world closer to Christ's return.

Many premillennialists also hold to what is called a dispensational interpretation of the Bible. This view, originated by John N. Darby in the 19th century, places a heavy emphasis on interpreting various scriptures as prophetic, or predictive, of events to transpire in the future. Thus, Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Ezekiel, and Daniel hold the hidden keys to understanding events as they unfold in the 20th century. In addition, dispensationalism regards different passages of scripture as applying only to certain times in history. For instance, consider a passage like Isaiah 11, which reads, "Then the wolf shall live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall grow up together" (Isaiah 11:6). This is simply a description of the millennium, and has relevance only to that time. Furthermore, critical passages such as Christ's teachings about the kingdom of God, and the style of life and love it requires, are also understood by dispensationalists as applying to the time when Christ returns to establish his thousand-year reign on earth.

The millennium will consist of an actual rule of Christ on earth, over all the nations and peoples of the

If God is the kind of God-active-in-history of whom the Bible speaks, then concern for the course of history is itself not an illegitimate or an irrelevant concern.

—JOHN H. YODER

world. During that time, creation will be restored to fruitfulness and harmony, and peace shall reign. The biblical promises for creation's redemption find their fulfillment on earth, but only during the millennium, after Christ's return.

THE CHURCH HAS lived through many ages when its own persecution, combined with the ungodliness of the times, have made a premillennial view seem persuasive and compelling. But other historical experiences of the church have given rise to alternative views.

When the Emperor Constantine came to power in the fourth century and converted to Christianity, the church's view of the future shifted decisively. Suddenly, future promises of a reigning kingdom brought by God seemed to be present. In this context, postmillennialism developed, and was the dominant view of the church into the Middle Ages.

Postmillennialism asserts that the thousand-year reign of Christ begins on earth before the end of history. God's purposes are progressively accomplished as this reign is extended, perfecting the world and bringing it closer to its final fulfillment. While premillennialism tends to postpone all the effects of God's redemption of the creation until after Christ's second coming, postmillennialism looks for nearly all the effects of this new kingdom within the present age.

Unlike the era in which Christendom reigned, in our time the naiveté of postmillennialism seems obvious. History is not moving progressively toward a utopia. What the world calls progress seems to move civilization further away from the kingdom of God, rather than closer to it. And the danger of the postmillennial view has been to identify forms of Christendom—ranging from Constantine's empire to the New World in North America—with the kingdom of God, baptizing its order, power, and even its armed might with divine blessing.

But are we then thrown into the arms of an apocalyptic premillennialism? Are we to agree that the Bible's vision for the world's future is marked solely by catastrophe and disaster? I think not.

The most extreme form of this perspective, dispensational premillennialism, gained a hold among fundamentalism primarily through the conversion of evangelist Dwight L. Moody to this view. Later, dispensational premillennialism was incorporated into the millions of Scofield Reference Bibles, whose interpretations were seen as infallible as the scripture itself early this century.

Today many leading evangelical scholars and leaders discredit this position. Equating contemporary events

in the Middle East to obscure references in Ezekiel seems bizarre to growing numbers of conservative Christians. Predicting the course of contemporary foreign affairs from subtle and forced interpretations of Old Testament writings strikes many as requiring more imagination than writing the script for *Star Wars*. Certainly the intention and message of these Old Testament scriptures for the church today cannot be reduced to predicting tomorrow's newspaper headlines.

Further, the ethical implications of this view, if followed consistently, conflict directly with the thrust of the biblical message. If, in fact, things must be worse before they will get better, why try to reverse signs of the world's deterioration? Why work for peace if war is a sign of Christ's coming? Why feed the hungry if we are

to expect famine? Why save the creation if its destiny is to be destroyed by fire? As author Tom Sine suggests in *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy* (Word Books, 1981), believing in this vision of the future would have us torpedo the grain boats in order to advance famine and bring us close to the millennium.

Even when the more extreme positions of dispensationalism are rejected, Christians committed to a premillennial view are still faced with the challenge of constructing an ethic motivating Christians to be involved in the task of bringing God's shalom, justice, and

peace to the creation, and doing so now, rather than waiting for the end. The more prevalent tendency is for these Christians to withdraw into a countercultural enclave that views the "world" as evil and sees little hope of changing its conditions. Notable exceptions can be found, such as theologian Vernon C. Grounds, whose book *Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Lippincott, 1971) is proof that premillennialists can be passionately concerned for social justice. But voices like his within the premillennial camp remain a minority.

Premillennialism responds exclusively to only one tributary within the stream of the Bible's message. Certainly, some scriptures picture growing calamity as history draws to a close (for instance, Matthew 24:6-8, Mark 13:7-8, Luke 21:10-11).

Other scriptures, however, underscore that God's reign over creation is already established. In Luke 17:20-21, for example, we read that the Pharisees asked Christ when the kingdom of God will come. Christ replied, "You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes. There will be no saying, 'Look, here it is!' or 'there it is!'; for in fact the kingdom of God is among you." Christ's teaching and ministry are aimed at announcing the inauguration of the kingdom of God, which takes a foothold in history in the midst of the present age.

*I have come to know
and understand more
and more the profound
this-worldliness
of Christianity....It is
only by living completely
in this world
that one learns to
have faith.*

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Likewise, the focus of passages such as Colossians 1:13-14 emphasizes that our experience of this kingdom begins not at the end of time, but in our present life. "He rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us away into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom our release is secured and our sins forgiven." The epistle then continues, extending this new rulership by Christ over all creation. "His is the primacy over all created things" (1:15).

In passages such as these, there is no indication that Christ's reconciliation of the whole universe awaits some future date. Rather, the proclamation is that this has already been accomplished. In the same fashion, Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun."

IS THERE A THEOLOGICAL tradition concerning the future that struggles to preserve this biblical tension? Yes. Traditionally, it has been called amillennialism. On the one hand, this stance recognizes that the promise of God's reign is not merely consigned to the future, but establishes its roots in the present. At the same time, amillennialism recognizes that there is no simple, progressive unfolding of the kingdom. The new order has begun now, but the old order is still present.

Theologians, in describing the coming kingdom of God, have spoken of the tension between the "already" and the "not yet." This helps to capture the full biblical picture concerning God's redemption of creation.

In his book *Christ and Time* (Westminster, 1964), Oscar Cullman has used the wartime analogy of D-Day and V-Day to describe this same truth. Christ's life, death, and resurrection is the triumphant invasion of God's grace, claiming the world as God's own. The final victory, V-Day, is assured, fulfilled at the end of history. The church finds itself in between these two times, in the midst of tension and battle, yet knowing that the triumph inaugurated on D-Day will be complete.

Augustine, along with Luther, Calvin, and most of the Reformers, held to an amillennial view. The thousand years referred to in Revelation 20 is not taken literally, but figuratively, like many of the symbols and references found there. Amillennialism holds that Christ's triumphant reign over creation, acknowledged by the church, has already begun and grows even while forces of rebellion attempt to pull the creation toward destruction and death.

The disarming of those rebellious powers is assured by Christ's victory. "On that cross he discarded the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public spectacle of them and led them as captives in his triumphal procession" (Colossians 2:15). Yet they do not finally give up their grasp over creation without an ongoing struggle. "For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against authorities and

potentates of this dark world" (Ephesians 6:12).

The amillennial perspective recognizes both the creation's blessing as God's gift and the "curse" that falls upon humanity for taking possession of creation as part of the biblical message.

We do well to keep in mind the various ways in which the New Testament refers to the "world" when we fashion a biblical view of the future. In one sense, this world—meaning the organization of life apart from God—is rushing toward judgment and is destined to pass away. Yet God's salvation reaches to this world, and to the whole creation, in order to win it back to God. The destiny of creation is determined not by its rebellion, but finally by its redemption through Jesus Christ.

Even the most apocalyptic passage of the gospel found in Matthew 24 and 25 does not end with an admonition to withdraw from a world headed for destruction. On the contrary, the basis of the final judgment is the extent of one's engagement in the world: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, providing shelter to the homeless, clothing the naked, and giving comfort to the imprisoned—in short, re-establishing God's shalom within the creation (Matthew 25:31-46). Christ, who is the prince of this shalom, and present in all creation, is the One who is served by these acts.

In response to signs of potential destruction and calamity within the creation, Jesus calls his followers to concrete actions that claim the creation as God's own, extending God's compassion to heal the wounds of the world. Those who fail to respond hear the words, "The curse is upon you" (Matthew 25:41). But those who faithfully act to restore creation hear the Son of God say, "You have my Father's blessing; come, enter, and possess the kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made" (25:34). ■

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, a Sojourners contributing editor, is the General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America in New York City. This article is adapted from a Sojourners' book excerpt of Granberg-Michaelson's book, A Worldly Spirituality (Harper & Row, 1984).

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

What attracts people in this present age to concentrate discussion on the "end times"?

If indeed the world faces an apocalyptic future, how should the church respond to what seems to be a biblical call to peacemaking?

How has discussion of premillennialist or postmillennialist thinking within your church or the culture influenced you? Have you ever read the scriptures to check how you interpret the passages that are so often used in these discussions? Does your doctrinal position on this issue affect your spiritual life? How? How does it affect your spiritual action?

Bible Study: Luke 17:20-21

SHORT ON SCRIPTURE, LONG ON IDEOLOGY

The paradox of the Religious Right.

BY MARK CERBONE

Well-respected Catholic theologians Richard Neuhaus and Michael Novak have been invited to speak at the Christian Coalition's "Road to Victory" national conference in September 1994. Both men give insightful, biblically informed presentations to their attentive evangelical listeners. Neuhaus affirms "moral reason and discourse" and repeatedly underlines the need for tolerance, respect, and dialogue in politics. Novak affirms the importance of "conversation" and requests "a restoration of civility."

The crowd listens quietly, and applauds little.

Half an hour later, Coalition executive director Ralph Reed addresses the same crowd. Soon they begin booing and hissing Bill Clinton and laughing at the mention of Jocelyn Elders.

So much for tolerance and civil discourse. Such is the paradox of the Religious Right.

Anyone even remotely interested in politics and national affairs these days is aware of the growing influence of the Religious Right. From Sunday morning TV political analysis to endless newspaper editorials to protests outside Christian Coalition events, recognition of conservative Christian political activism is widespread. There's reason for this media attention and vocal opposition: The Coalition is preparing to send millions of "Christian voter guides" through the mail, James Dobson motivates torrents of phone calls to Washington regarding upcoming legislation, Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council has become a nationally visible spokesperson for "family concerns," and former drug czar Bill Bennett's *The Book of Virtues* has stayed near the top of *The New York Times*' best-seller list.

The Religious Right sees itself in a struggle for the nation's future direction. Christian conservatives highlight the contrast between Bill and Hillary Clinton's churchgoing liberalism—an oxymoron to the Religious Right—and their own "traditional family values." The battle is on: Will the United States eventually succumb to moral chaos, or will an ethical national foundation be restored? Will immorality or godly values ultimately prevail?

The presidency is the most visible prize in this competition, with the Congress, governorships, state legislatures, and school boards also hotly pursued. And with the favorable results of the '94 elections firmly in mind,

real political power has never seemed more attainable to the Religious Right.

Having closely observed the Religious Right for years, I have emphasized examining the Christian Coalition from the "inside." As a Coalition member, I have participated in its leadership training seminar and attended three Road to Victory national conferences and the "Faith and Freedom '94" regional conference. I've listened to hundreds of Focus on the Family broadcasts and spent a day at Focus headquarters. And I have listened to a thousand hours of conservative Christian talk radio, engaging in more than 50 live call-ins with guests ranging from Don Wildmon to Cal Thomas to Paul Weyrich.

I don't need convincing that this movement wields great and increasing influence, both in the U.S. church and in national and local politics. But as visible as the Religious Right has become, it does not speak for all theologically conservative Christians in this country, nor is it the only faith-based voice that should be heard during this turbulent time.

TWO OPENING OBSERVATIONS provide context for my more specific comments. First, the rising tide of conservative activism can be readily traced back to Jerry Falwell's establishment of the Moral Majority in the late 1970s, along with the slowly growing political dimensions of Pat Robertson's *700 Club* beginning around that same time. Falwell gained new prominence by calling conservative believers to shake off their relative political apathy and become involved in the moral issues—especially abortion—that were then beginning to intrude on the consciousness of Christians.

While Falwell utilized his pulpit to help build a national political organization, Robertson devoted an increasing percentage of his internationally televised program to news coverage, economic forecasting, and political commentary. Both men went on to found sizable universities designed to produce graduates firmly committed to conservative theology wedded to conservative political views.

Second, the Religious Right is far from monolithic. While many core values are held in common, conservative Christian political activism is not a coordinated effort advancing on all fronts. For instance, there has never been a discernible sense of friendship and partner-



Matt Wuerker

ship between Falwell and Robertson. (Falwell pointedly endorsed George Bush for president when Robertson was a candidate in 1988.) James Dobson rarely if ever alludes to either man or organization. Gary Bauer's Family Research Council is a spin-off from Focus on the Family, with Bauer serving as Focus' eyes and ears (and voice) in Washington. Chuck Colson lends his presence very selectively, periodically appearing on Focus on the Family, making his first-ever visit to the Coalition's Road to Victory conference in 1995, while never aligning himself publicly (to my knowledge) with Falwell.

of the program, and any sense of a coherent, biblically grounded vision at its core.

God's blessing is invoked and presumed for this event. The belief that God has sovereignly chosen "America" to play an unparalleled role on the world stage seems to be a bedrock belief for the great majority of Coalition participants. This unique national status is not only accepted but celebrated. While others associated with the Religious Right may not be as routinely jubilant about the presumed evangelical faith of the Founding Fathers, God's aid in winning the American

Phyllis Schlafley's Eagle Forum and Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America seem warmly regarded by most everyone, but also appear to have their own turf staked out. Oliver North has developed an organization (Freedom Alliance) and used to be a headliner at many conservative Christian functions, but his popularity seems to have faded after losing his Virginia Senate bid. Pat Buchanan and Alan Keyes now appear to be the leading voices for aggressive, morality-based conservatism, but what will become of them after their presidential campaigns flounder?

In short, though the overall cast of characters and groups is fairly stable, "hot items" seem to come and go. Partnerships generally seem to be limited to carefully chosen appearances and increasingly judicious endorsements.

WHAT IS MOTIVATING all this strategizing, organizing, and jockeying for position? The impetus for this movement has always been as much political as theological. This appears particularly true for the Christian Coalition.

Those looking for serious biblical reflection and sustained dialogue to help shape a rationale for Christian citizenship and political activism should skip the Road to Victory. This sizable event (more than 4,000 people in attendance in '95) is long on conservative rhetoric, liberal-bashing, and unquestioning "patriotism," but virtually devoid of scriptural exposition, interaction with members

Revolution, and Lincoln's piety, born-again conservatives soak in the writings and speeches of Christian historian-evangelist Peter Marshall and David Barton's slide shows on U.S. history. Critical questions are not raised at presentations like these; vigorous head-nodding, loud "amens," and standing ovations are the normal responses to Marshall's and Barton's perspectives.

This selective reading of history leads to certain conclusions about this nation's heritage and destiny, in turn fueling a sense of urgency to rescue the United States, restoring it to a place of moral authority and military supremacy. This perception of its mission shapes how the Religious Right's leadership and rank and file read the Bible and interpret national and world events.

This "godly heritage"—a favorite phrase—makes the current crisis of national leadership and moral direction all the more appalling for Christian conservatives. At the same time, there is an uncanny sense of elation that God is raising up people of moral integrity and clear vision "for such a time as this"—another key phrase. This sizable group of evangelicals, fundamentalists, and charismatics is being joined by "devout Roman Catholics" (note the emergence of Catholic Alliance, a new division of the Coalition) and more recently by "conservative Jews." The expanding Coalition may not be preoccupied with proselytizing within its own ranks, but it is *very* concerned with rescuing a nation in decline. And there is a sense of victory in the air.

Despite residual disappointment that the Reagan Revolution did not accomplish the degree of change and return to conservative values that his supporters had anticipated, religious conservatives have renewed hope for ultimate victory. Electoral politics remain a key vehicle for change, and the '94 election results, from Republican control of Congress to conservative victories in many state and local elections, convinced Christian conservatives that their vision was resonating across the nation, putting even greater conquests within reach.

OBSERVERS PROBING FOR deeper insight into the motivation, worldview, and goals of the Religious Right might be surprised at how shallow the Christian foundation seems to be. Beyond repeated, general statements calling for "a restoration of godly values" and for Christians to "get involved," there is little description of what thoughtful, biblically informed citizenship might involve.

Nor is there much sustained reflection from scripture as to what a nation truly founded on godly values might actually look like. The ever-present demon of "secular humanism" is identified as the enemy of all things moral and decent. Secular humanism, as functionally defined by the Religious Right, seems to mean putting "man" and human wisdom at the center of things, while denying the existence of a living God and the authority of the Bible.

Despite much invoking of God and mentioning of God's name, scripture references are infrequent and positions clearly based on careful biblical reflection are rare. Instead, conservative political ideology, an idealized perception of U.S. history, and nostalgia for the

"good old days" (the America of the late 1940s and '50s) are blended together to create a picture of where we came from and how to return there.

The Religious Right has advocated the reintroduction of a number of key ideas and values back into political dialogue, including personal responsibility, the importance of family, virtue, civic duty, and patriotism. While secular conservatives share most of these concerns, the Religious Right's zeal for values and belief in God's unique blessing on this country have become forces driving the discussion.

Special mention must be made of Christian conservatives' fierce advocacy for the unborn, especially in view of the apparent willingness of many secular conservatives to negotiate on this issue. Raising foundational questions and introducing some badly needed common sense into political and ethical discussions is a valuable role for the Religious Right. While much of the agenda of the Religious Right can seem ill-supported by scripture, its adherents' belief in the existence of absolutes and the notion of right and wrong provides a moral foundation from which they operate.

Politically active conservative Christians typically share a firm—even fervent—conviction that believers acting on their principles can impact this nation and perhaps even change its course. They also refuse to be taken lightly. The Coalition's Ralph Reed and Family Research Council's Gary Bauer take the lead in accurately identifying media biases and insults against the evangelical community as unacceptable, insisting that people of faith and traditional values—including conservative Christians—should have an equal say at the "table" of ideas.

FEW OF THE PEOPLE involved—including many leaders—in Religious Right activities, from the Road to Victory conference to radio call-in programs, seem to be operating from a biblically grounded position. Whether I dialogue with conference participants or pro-life demonstrators or listen to talk shows, not many seem to have much familiarity with the broader sweep of biblical teaching. Politically active conservative Christians may identify scriptural authority as a key tenet of their faith, yet few seem to draw on the Bible very much when applying their faith to complicated issues of citizenship, political involvement, or moral direction for society.

Limited biblical reflection may in turn help explain the strange acceptance of highly secular voices and perspectives at Christian gatherings, most notably the Road to Victory conferences. Prominent politicians who make no Christian claim (Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, Phil Gramm) are warmly received, but this can be expected at a politically oriented gathering. More troubling is the enthusiastic response given to hard-core secularists (Gordon Liddy, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Elliott Abrams) after they peddle their wares. And although he has never identified himself in any substantial way with the Religious Right, the presence and opinions of Rush Limbaugh seem to pervade all conservative Christian gatherings.

The paucity of biblical grounding coupled with the remarkable acceptance of secular viewpoints is also

reflected in the print, audio, and video resources available at Road to Victory events. Little is distinctively "Christian" about most of the pamphlets, flyers, periodicals, tapes, and videos sold or circulated during the conference. Some of the T-shirts, posters, and bumper stickers sold border on the crude, especially in connection with the Clintons.

The annual "Congressional Scorecards" distributed by the Coalition are also disappointing. A selective list of issues and legislation is used as a basis for evaluating the voting record of senators and congressional representatives. Balancing the budget, term limits, military spending, abortion-related questions, and "family issues" receive the most attention. Elected officials scoring well based on these criteria are applauded and identified as "friends of the family." Those scoring low are scorned as "liberals" and targeted for defeat in the next election.

Some of these criteria are legitimate, but the list of concerns is strikingly limited. The Bible has far more to say about how the powerful treat the poor than it does about prayer in public schools, but you wouldn't know it by these voting guides. Based on the guidelines, protecting the environment, developing strategies for empowering the poor, sharing our nation's abundance through effective international relief and development programs, and thoughtful, community-based approaches for renewing decaying urban centers are not a consideration for evaluating the vision and quality of national leadership. The standard utilized to assess congressional performance seems skewed.

Another of the paradoxes of the Religious Right—and one of its greatest strengths—is its seemingly uncompromising call for protection of human life, though this is not as consistent and comprehensive as it sounds. As with many of its other positions, the full implications seem under-explored. The 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision admittedly caught most conservative Christians unaware. Abortion's rapidly mounting toll gradually dawned on Christians, aided by prods like Francis Schaeffer's book and film series of the late '70s, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* During the early and middle '80s, abortion on demand became the issue that drew conservative believers into the ethical and legislative battles. No issue before or since has galvanized Bible-believers like abortion.

But if human life is sacred from conception to natural death, then why don't conservative Christians value and protect life in all cases? Why is some killing—including widespread and brutal killing—not only justified but in some cases celebrated? Why are the unborn cherished (appropriately) while crack babies and parentless urban children are ignored by most self-identified Christians? Why do many conservative Christians strongly endorse cutting government aid for the needy while offering no tangible assistance to help people break out of poverty's cycle of despair? Why are the pope's pronouncements on abortion eagerly quoted, while his views on poverty, injustice, and environmental

degradation—"pro-life" issues all—conveniently ignored?

Why, in short, is human life rightly identified as sacred in the womb, yet treated so lightly in many other situations? This type of inconsistency makes evangelical Christianity appear morally incoherent.

CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN political activists—especially the leaders of the Christian Coalition—see themselves as a maturing movement. In some ways, this may be true. For nearly 20 years, many sincere people of faith have caught a vision for involvement in politics, ethical questions, and national life. With increasing awareness of the world around them, theologically and politically conservative Christians have helped preserve much of what is good about the United States.

Whatever their blind spots, the Religious Right is serious about its mission. "We are reclaiming this country and the values that made it great!" proclaimed Ralph Reed at Faith and Freedom '94. They claim to want to create a new generation of moral leadership and are motivated, organized, and developing resources toward that end. The collegial relationship between Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed perfectly symbolizes the empowerment of the younger generation by a founding leader.

Progressive Christians are now beginning to reckon with the size and influence of the Religious Right. Perhaps this will motivate progressive leaders finally to develop some sustained partnership and work together in creating an alternative Christian voice. Whether or not established leaders will also invest in and empower a younger generation of men and women with spiritual zeal, global vision, and leadership gifts remains to be seen. Mentoring has never been a strength of the "radical evangelicals." But if alternative biblical visions are to be offered to the church and the nation, strong and talented younger believers must be identified, included, and entrusted with significant responsibility.

A battle of values is indeed taking place. But it is taking place within the church as well as throughout our culture. ■

MARK CERBONE, a member of West Side Church of the Living Word in Buffalo, New York, has been a longtime observer of, and a regular speaker on, the Christian Right.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Do you agree with Cerbone that the Religious Right is fueled more by "conservative rhetoric, liberal-bashing, and unquestioning 'patriotism'" than by "scriptural exposition"? What is the biblical basis for your theological and political views? Can you name passages that support your views?

What would you say are the most critical political issues for faith-based people today?

A CHORUS OF FAITH

Differences and similarities among evangelicals.

BY JILL CARROLL LAFFERTY

Michael Mata describes the 1992 riots in Los Angeles as the city's social earthquake. What happened afterward for LA's religious community was a groundswell.

As the city's church leaders attempted to engage in a discussion of rebuilding and healing the community, they learned that they did not know each other, and that some groups were not even organized to the extent that they could meet other groups at the table, Mata said.

"We brought significant leadership together, hoping relationships would emerge, but we found they didn't know one another. Afterward, some of those relationships have continued to be vital relationships. Now I find that when people are looking for groups to come to the table, they already have a list."

A professor at the School of Theology at Claremont and an associate pastor of the First Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles, Mata is a bridge builder for Christians, bringing whites and African Americans, Latinos and Asians, conservative evangelicals and progressive evangelicals into forums and town hall meetings where they can discuss community issues and discover shared values.

What is clear, Mata believes, is that evangelicals are anything but single-minded. They respond to issues and live out their faith in ways based on the myriad of ethnicities, classes, and experiences they represent. The white community responds differently than the African-American community. Asian evangelicals offer a different perspective than Latino evangelicals. Those perspectives determine how faith and action are integrated.

"Some of the critique of the response in the aftermath of the social earthquake is that people have returned to business as usual," Mata said. "With the demands of ministry at the local level, energy has been rechanneled back into that reality. But opportunities have emerged to capitalize on those networks and come to the table on other issues."

If there is space for all evangelicals at Christ's table, the idea that any media-savvy evangelicals speak for the totality must be challenged. Evangelical action is as diverse as the churches and Christians who claim the title "evangelical," even as it is misunderstood by a secular world.

The Primary Lexicon

"EVANGELICALS ARE NOT what they appear to be from the outside," Tony Campolo, professor of sociology at Eastern College, said. "From the outside, evangelicals look like a monolithic Religious Right group of people. It's not that. It is not even close to that."

Campolo believes that about one-third of evangelicals would consider themselves a part of the Religious Right, another third would describe themselves as progressive, and the remainder are indifferent to the struggle. What needs to be challenged is the one-sided image that groups like the Christian Coalition have promoted so well. As an evangelical in the Call to Renewal, Campolo said that while there are points of agreement with the Christian Coalition, the movement has become so closely aligned with the Republican Party that it supports concerns and issues that are not necessarily Christian. For example, Campolo believes that the Coalition's pro-life stand does not go far enough.

"They are pro-life on abortion, but they haven't taken a position on cigarettes. They have not taken a strong stand on capital punishment or militarism, which are also pro-life issues. Strange as it may sound, we don't think the Christian Coalition is pro-life enough."

Ron Sider, head of Evangelicals for Social Action, believes there is a significant movement of progressive evangelicals who want a Bible-centered theology that encompasses more than either end of the traditional religious and political spectrums.

"There is a bloc of progressive evangelicals that simply is not the Religious Right and not the Religious Left," he said. "We are concerned with justice for the poor and the sanctity of life, saying no to sexual promiscuity and the destruction of the environment."

The task before these evangelicals is to engage in study that combines constant adherence to scripture and solid analysis of issues, he said. Evangelicals for Social Action is in the process of exploring biblically informed positions on a number of social issues, ranging from public policy toward gay America to no-fault divorces. The foundation of this study is what Sider calls being "fundamentally biblical." "If you're concerned with the poor and peacemaking and not the family and the unborn, forget about it," Sider said.

With the Sermon on the Mount as their primary lex-

WHAT IS EVANGELICAL?



icon, more and more evangelicals are finding ways to engage in global action, World Vision's Brian Sellers-Petersen said. If history has characterized evangelicals as isolationists, Sellers-Petersen believes that is changing. "I think one of the bigger trends is that people are wanting a faith that works, not just on Sunday morning, but in terms of larger societal issues," he said. "They want a faith to be not only personal but corporate. They want to see it work in Kigali and in Sarajevo. We're getting people to think about that mandate in terms of our own evangelical understanding that we are called to be engaged in the world."

The Biblical Mustard Seeds

GORDON AESCHLIMAN, WHO speaks about issues involving young people and Christianity, describes many of those young people as homeless.

"This younger homeless group has a very high sense of self, respect for their own values, and believes those values are biblical—but they don't find a church excited or able to organize around the same values. If they turn 180 degrees to the Right, they find a church that is alive and ready to accept their energy," Aeschliman said.

But the church to the Right does not resonate with many young Christians either, he said. People under 40 years old view themselves as being part of church systems that are no longer legitimate in terms of what they believe biblically and how they act socially. If being evangelical means being a part of the Christian Coalition, then young people are not willing to claim that title, he said.

"What fundamentalists do biblically and socially is set up non-negotiables that define their agenda and become fairly militant to others to join," Aeschliman said. "The Christian Coalition has drawn the line on two or three issues—homosexuality, abortion, prayer—whether or not one agrees with their agenda is their litmus test on whether one is a Christian."

The result, Aeschliman said, is that young people are attaching themselves to organizations that represent their values, but not necessarily their theology. They are practical people, living out their theology everywhere from soup kitchens to concert fund-raisers. Aeschliman describes them as the biblical mustard seeds, working quietly, without a flood of press releases telling what they are doing. But what they are doing is growing into the proverbial tree that is big enough to make a difference.

"They never really are at home," he said. "Some have found churches where faith is articulated in a way that makes sense to them, but I don't think that experience is as common as the other side."

A Challenge for Progressives

"THERE ARE A NUMBER of highly important tasks that the Christian churches need to self-consciously perform which are the foundation to any effective program of Christian action. For progressive evangelicals, they take these tasks for granted and don't mention them," Roberta Hestenes, president of Eastern College, said.

That foundation includes the stretching of people's

understanding of the whole of the scriptures and accepting responsibility for character building, she said. Building that foundation will involve such old-fashioned institutions as Sunday school and newer congregational trends like small groups.

With a foundation in place, churches can move forward on three levels: calling congregation members to live out their faith seven days a week, leading groups within congregations to direct volunteer service, and linking congregations into networks, Hestenes said. She holds up examples like Love Inc., which builds relationships between church members and homeless families, and the Christian Community Development Association, a grassroots-up organization that links congregations with community development projects.

But while there are models of action across America, Hestenes describes evangelicalism in general as a dispersed movement linked by relationships and books. Progressives need to find ways to fund their own think tanks and organize precinct by precinct, she said.

"If we are going to go forward, we have to do fresh thinking as well as fresh acting," she said. "I'm not unhopeful—but I don't see us doing that yet."

What's Next for Evangelicals?

CAMPOLO BELIEVES THAT evangelicals who aren't making the headlines should not be angry at those who are. Rather, they've given the rest of the evangelicals at the table a lot to learn.

"I am convinced that people in the Christian Coalition for the most part are Christians and are operating out of deep conviction and conscience," Campolo said. "They are sincere; they are seeking God's will. So are we. We are trying to be the same kind of people. With such similar intentions, it seems to me that behind the public scenes there ought to be dialogue between us and efforts to diminish the tensions that exist. We will obviously disagree on many issues, but we have to disagree in love. These issues that are so important to us today will be resolved in the next 50 years, and we want to make sure to conduct ourselves in such a way that the church does not have a bad name 50 years from now because of the way we acted."

JILL CARROLL LAFFERTY is a former Sojourners intern. She reports on religion and other community issues for the Ottumwa Courier in Ottumwa, Iowa.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Tony Campolo is quoted as saying that the "pro-life" position of the Religious Right does not go far enough, since it limits the Christian concern for the preservation of "life" strictly to opposing abortion. What would it mean to be truly pro-life in all areas of life, including our attitudes to poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation?

Lafferty writes that the Sermon on the Mount has been encouraging more and more evangelicals to take social action. Read the Sermon account in either Matthew 5-7 or Luke 6:17-49. Do you think these principles apply to your own life? If so, how can you live these out?

A HIJACKED HERITAGE

Faith in the age of ideology.

BY TOM SINE

The Religious Right has hijacked American evangelicalism and made it an aberration in the global evangelical community. Many of us who are evangelicals in America no longer feel that we have a home in the movement.

Through the social upheavals of the '50s and '60s, American evangelicalism was little moved. Culturally the movement has always been somewhat conservative. And in those days most conservative Protestants were taught that faith was solely related to the spiritual realm, so few evangelicals got involved in working for social or political change during the civil rights or anti-poverty movements.

As the decade of the '70s began, a number of evangelicals belatedly began to become involved in struggling with issues like racism, world hunger, and the environment. The Chicago Declaration in 1973 and the Lausanne Covenant in 1974 reflected this awakening of the evangelical consciences toward Christian social responsibility.

In 1978, Billy Graham, *Christianity Today*, and Wheaton College were at the front of the parade as the discussion of Christian social responsibility was still expanding. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority, Timothy LaHaye, the Religious Roundtable, and others hijacked the evangelical parade and gave it a decisive wrench to the Right. It has never recovered.

At the end of the Reagan era, the Moral Majority folded its tents and slipped away. But with the election of Democrat Bill Clinton, the new flagship of the Religious Right experienced remarkable growth. The Christian Coalition, started by Pat Robertson, is 1.5 million strong and still growing at a rapid clip. Ralph Reed, the young chief executive officer of the Christian Coalition, takes credit for the recent Republican landslide. We can be sure the Christian Coalition will play a major role in the selection of the Republican candidate for president in 1996 and in the shaping of our political future.

Of course, not all evangelicals in the United States are members of the Coalition or political activists for right-wing causes. But I believe the influence of the Religious Right has been seriously underestimated.

The Christian Right has intellectually hijacked the American evangelical movement, first by defining what's wrong—"secular humanism." They have also determined what the politically correct issues are—"abortion, pornography, gay rights, and traditional family values"—and decided that the correct political identity of Christians should be conservative Republicanism.

I HAVE FOUND NO other country in the Western world where evangelicals have to be conservative Republicans, or the equivalent, to be considered genuine

Christians. Evangelicals in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Great Britain, Holland, or Germany don't have to subscribe to a narrow political ideology of the Right or Left to be politically correct.

For example, in Great Britain, evangelicals focus on a broad spectrum of public policy issues. Instead of simply adopting the political position of the ideological Right, like the Christian Right in America, British evangelicals do careful public policy analysis of each issue, then study

scripture to define biblical principles that relate to the specific issue, and then define their position. As a result of this biblical approach, instead of an ideological approach, they are all over the map politically on issues of concern.

The Religious Right in America is indeed an aberration. It is time to call American evangelicals back to their heritage, a biblical heritage. ■

TOM SINE is the author, most recently, of *Cease Fire: Searching for Sanity in America's Culture Wars* (Eerdmans, 1995).

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Tom Sine writes that evangelicalism in the United States has become limited by "a narrow political ideology of the Right or Left." How might American evangelicals begin to learn from evangelical Christians in other countries?

Has the Religious Right "hijacked American evangelicalism" or called the church back to a "biblical heritage"?

Do you consider yourself evangelical? Why or why not?

If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

THE SPIRIT SPEAKS

Celebrating the power and importance of pentecostalism.

BY AARON GALLEGOS

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
—Joel 2:28-29

Baptisms in the Spirit and in fire, discerning of spirits and interpretations of tongues, “holy laughter” and “slayings in the Spirit.” These are some of the characteristics that have caused many Christians to look with suspicion at those sisters and brothers who consider themselves pentecostals or charismatics. Indeed, in the original outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the grieving followers of Jesus in Jerusalem—when devout men and women of “every nation under heaven” heard the disciples speak in their own languages—the exuberant expressions of the Spirit caused some to say they were “full of new wine” or even crazy (Acts 2:1-13).

Yet with more than 450 million adherents worldwide, pentecostalism is starting to be taken seriously by many religious and social scholars, as well as by other believers. Pentecostalism has now become the fastest-growing Christian group in the world, and there are many signs of a global revival.

It isn't just the numbers that are turning heads; also attracting attention is the effect that these zealous pentecostal congregations are starting to have on their surrounding communities and the signs of the future of the church that these groups carry within them. For along with expressions of the Spirit, pentecostals are increasingly becoming known for radical ways of living and worshipping that are contrary to mainstream social and religious sensibilities and that transcend barriers of race, class, and gender to build hopeful bonds of unity among believers.

THE AZUSA STREET REVIVAL of 1906, which marks the beginning of the modern pentecostal movement, was considered unique at the time not just because believers spoke in tongues and were healed of their dis-

eases. Even more scandalous to the turn-of-the-century establishment was the racial mixing taking place in the small Los Angeles livery stable turned into a mission. The vision of William J. Seymour, a one-eyed, self-taught African-American preacher who brought the message of the outpouring of the Spirit to Los Angeles, included a new level of Christian unity that—similar to the first Pentecost—brought together believers of all colors in a community modeled after the new heaven and earth that was to come.

While speaking in tongues was seen as one of the signs of the infilling of the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:46, 19:6), Seymour and the others knew it could be faked and considered more certain characteristics of the Spirit to be holy living and unity among believers—whatever their race. The evidence of love and purity could not be manifested over the long term unless one had had a true renewal of the heart.

The Azusa Street Revival, which lasted until about 1909, was primarily attended by poor and working-class African Americans, whites, and believers of Mexican and Filipino descent. Los Angeles at the time was rapidly changing from a predominantly Mexican-American ranching and agricultural town to an industrial Anglo-American city. Similar to our society today, it was a place where many faced unemployment and poverty because they didn't adapt to the changing conditions quickly enough.

The power that was being poured out on Azusa Street offered those who

attended a sense of liberation and a strong alternative to a world which they saw as falling apart around them. Seymour's revival brought Joel's prophecy to life for unemployed agricultural and industrial workers, oppressed domestic servants and maids, and those marginalized because of their race—making them into a common family with a new mission to share the news that God was pouring out the Spirit upon “all people.” It was the diversity of those who participated in Azusa Street, in part, that contributed to the amazing speed with which the news—and power—of the revival was carried around the world.

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Today, many of the world's poor and dispossessed are becoming part of the pentecostal movement for some of the same reasons people were attracted to the Azusa Street revival nearly 100 years ago. In times of dissolving paradigms and melting polarities, many pentecostal congregations offer a solid assurance and vital community more and more difficult to find in secular society.

In mainline and historic churches, such as Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and others, the pentecostal fire was stoked by the charismatic movement that rose in the 1970s. Charismatics adhere to many of the same spiritual beliefs as pentecostals, yet maintain their identity as members of traditional denominations. Although it is difficult to estimate the number of charismatics because of their affiliation with various churches, their movement, like that of the pentecostals, is growing at a rapid rate. During the last several decades, the shared experience of charismatics has contributed to new connections across denominational lines.

Fire From Heaven (Addison-Wesley, 1995), an important book by Harvard professor and theologian Harvey Cox on the rise of pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the 21st century, points to several critical factors in our changing society that have contributed to pentecostalism's growth and strength.

First, for a religious movement to appeal to people in modern society, it must address in some way the challenges that they are negotiating in the face of rapid urbanization and swiftly changing economic realities. Pentecostalism is largely a phenomenon of the exploding urban centers that are now found on every continent. As people flee traditional village areas to look for work in metropolitan areas, pentecostalism provides many with a sense of community and purpose in the midst of the harsh city. Also, the discipline and training that pentecostal congregations instill in their members as preparation for a mission of evangelism and service provide some of the skills needed to function in urban life.

Another factor contributing to the success of pentecostalism is its ability to help people hold on to some elements of the traditional culture and religion that they fear are falling apart around them. Pentecostalism does this essentially by appealing to what Cox calls our "primal spirituality." This is the religion of the heart that looks beyond human-made ecclesial structures to seek a personal experience with the living God.

As conventional science, politics, and religion became more and more discredited in the late 20th century, people began to look for a more certain hope on which to rest their beliefs. The direct manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of speaking in tongues, healing, and visions offers firsthand assurance that what they believe is indeed true. Pentecostals often state that "a person with a doctrine doesn't stand a chance against one with an experience."

WHILE THESE SIGNS AND wonders continued among the participants in the early American pentecost at Azusa Street, unfortunately, the racial unity that distinguished the revival fell apart after several years. Apparently disturbed by the media squall that criticized

the racially mixed worship services and the leadership of African Americans at Azusa Street, dissension developed and many of the white participants left to form their own congregations. While William J. Seymour and the other African-American members were beginning to see racial harmony, rather than tongues, as the most reliable sign of the Spirit's work, many of the white pentecostals began to prefer maintaining the racial status quo to God's work of building a community of believers modeled after that in heaven.

"The color line was washed away by the blood," one white observer at a revival had noted, but now it was being redrawn. By the time Seymour died in 1922, almost all public instances of interracial worship among pentecostals had ceased.

Also suspect in the eyes of detractors of Azusa Street was the fact that women held positions of leadership and exercised spiritual gifts in the mission. Seymour considered gender inclusivity to be another sure sign of the Spirit's presence, and the momentum of the pentecostal movement has been carried over the years predominantly by women. Harvey Cox writes that the primary role that women have fulfilled in the pentecostal movement has been to help bring out a much more mystical concept of God as lover of our souls—rather than emphasizing God as judge and lawgiver as some other denominations do.

Female evangelists and healers, such as Aimee Semple McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlmann, were playing major roles in the pentecostal churches during times when the leadership of women in other denominations was subjugated to that of men. The understanding in pentecostal theology that all individuals have the potential to be used as a vessel for the gifts of the Spirit created space for leadership roles for women and people of color unlike those that were available in other Christian churches.

The racial schism between black and white pentecostals continued to grow as each group formed their own churches, denominations, and associations. Just after World War II, the Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Holiness Church, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and other white pentecostal denominations formed the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America. Black pentecostal denominations, including the Church of God in Christ—which now has more than five million members—were not invited to join.

There were times when pentecostals of different races came together—most notably for the healing crusades of the late 1940s and 1950s—but for the most part the chasm between the races was as great in the church as it was in society. The separation's nadir occurred during the civil rights movement, when many white pentecostals sided with the segregationists, while black pentecostals were active with the freedom fighters.

The split of pentecostals along racial lines was also the occasion when many white pentecostals began to associate with the more socially acceptable fundamentalists and took on many of that group's worship and cultural characteristics. Though this alliance is being increasingly challenged today, fundamentalists and

those on the Religious Right did offer white pentecostals a more familiar cultural setting for worship in place of the early chaos and spontaneity that typified the Azusa Street services.

EVEN IN THE MIDST of division, black and white pentecostals have still seemed to be moving toward the biblical call to reconciliation. As the pentecostal denominations grew and started becoming more mainstream and less insulated, members brought with them an increased social awareness. Many new pentecostals believe that living by the "full gospel," which they claim to do, should include the oneness in spirit that Christ calls believers to (John 17:21). Now, some 30 years after the civil rights era, the understanding of racism as sin is starting to become part of the theological worldview of many white pentecostals.

1994's "Memphis Miracle," as it has become known, brought together some of these currents of reconciliation between black and white pentecostals. The meeting was called by the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) in order to start the process of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation between the groups of pentecostals that have been marred by more than 80 years of racial estrangement.

In order to start anew, the PFNA disbanded during the meeting and formed, along with African-American pentecostals, a new inclusive alliance called the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America. "If we really meant business, we'd have to be totally willing to disband and start fresh with a new organization," said the former head of the PFNA, B.E. Underwood, in an interview just after the gathering.

Though there was some initial mistrust on both sides, the Memphis meeting ended with participants pledging to fight racism in the body of Christ as "a blight in the Fellowship [that] must be condemned for having hindered the maturation of spiritual development and mutual sharing among Pentecostal-Charismatic believers for decades."

This new wave of unity in the Spirit is beginning to be felt on the congregational level with greater and greater frequency. Groups of pentecostal believers from diverse backgrounds are now placing racial reconciliation among the top items on their agendas. For pentecostals, both here and abroad, the gift of healing is becoming much broader than the glitzy, throw-down-your-crutches variety of the television revivals. Now, healing not only includes physical wholeness, but also social wholeness. Especially for those pentecostals based among the poor, the healing of social diseases such as racism, poverty, and substance abuse is an integral part of the work of the Spirit today.

Still, there are signs that the movement could drift away from the unity of all believers and the power of healing and reconciliation that we are now beginning to see. Many of the excesses of modern American relig-

ion—including the actions of Jim and Tammy Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert, Oral Roberts, and Pat Robertson—fall into the lap of the pentecostal movement. The possibility still exists for the movement to be taken captive by forces that are more nationalistic than biblical and more fundamentalist than Spirit-led.

As pentecostalism has moved into the mainstream of U.S. Christianity, some of the early zeal around what was perceived to be a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit has dissipated. Many affluent pentecostals are accommodating to the culture of consumerism and the "health-and-wealth" gospel of some churches. However, the vast majority of pentecostals around the world are poor and fervently hope for a spiritual revolution that will turn the existing order of the world upside down.

In the next millennium, the old paradigms and institutions of society will need to be transformed if they are to be relevant to the spiritual and social needs of the next generation. Perhaps the pentecostals, with their emphasis on direct engagement with the Spirit, can point the direction toward creative new solutions.

The impact of pentecostals on religion and the world depends on whether or not they continue their legacy of challenging the status quo or begin instead to conform to it. It is up to all of us, both pentecostals and other believers, to clear our hearts of all narrow-mindedness, bitterness, and hate in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of God (Acts 3:19). ■

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QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

What dangers are posed to pentecostal worship when it moves from a poor context to an affluent one? How can these dangers be averted?

How do you relate to people whose religious experience differs from your own? Are there ways to talk and work with others who share the same theological beliefs yet live out their faith in a way that is unfamiliar to you? How might you increase your understanding of and relationship to "the other," such as pentecostals, members of mainline Protestant churches, Catholics, Christians from different ethnic backgrounds, and those on the Religious Right?

Bible Study: Many of the accounts of Jesus healing illness carried social implications (for example, Luke 5:12-14; Luke 6:6-11; Luke 7:1-10; Luke 8:43-48). Reflect on these stories and their significance for our working to bring social wholeness to our society. What possible illnesses, social as well as personal, could be addressed by such a movement of the Spirit in your community?

A BITTER HARVEST OF HATRED

The game we must refuse to play.

BY ROBERTA HESTENES

One of my minor claims to 15 minutes of fame was appearing on a national network talk show where the host was Pat Sajak of the very popular game show *Wheel of Fortune*. Ever since, I have entertained fantasies of creating a sensationally successful new game show for the insatiable appetites of the American public. I finally have an idea for a new game show. It's called *Will the REAL Christian Please Stand Up?* It ought to be a sure-fire winner because so many people have been practicing some form of this game for such a long time.

The concept is simple. Place Christians of diverse views and perspectives in a gladiator's arena like the ones with the Christians and the lions in ancient Rome. Promise an enormous prize (like, for example, political power or cultural domination). The announcer declares that the prize can only be won by the group who most successfully attacks, vilifies, demonizes, and discredits all the other players in order to win the title of "Real Christian." The Game Judges (the secular media?), who cynically care little about any of the contestants or their views, seek to keep the audience entertained by fomenting the most controversy and noise possible and from time to time declare a temporary winner.

As a Christian woman, I have seen and been tempted by this game all too often—both as a Christian and as a woman. People who ought to share some fundamental values and behaviors rooted in their common confession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord lunge, instead, for each others' throats with labels, false assumptions, oversimplified generalizations, and personal attacks. Some even seek victory by declaring that Christians who do not share their specific political or ideological views are not Christians at all. Or if there are Christians who do

discourse are some of the weapons of choice.

In this mode of interaction, the problem is not the existence of differences. Differences are to be expected even among Christians. Differences should be discussed, debated, analyzed, and handled with respect and reason. Instead, in this destructive and dangerous game, differences are too often attributed to personal vices and dishonorable motives in order to discredit not only ideas but the persons who hold them. The ultimate escalation comes when rhetoric incites and results in violence. This kind of nastiness has been known from both the Right and the Left, although the Right clearly seems to be leading the field today. This pattern of conduct dishonors the gospel and discredits those who practice this "rhetoric of realpolitik." It poisons the public square and produces a bitter harvest of hatred.

There is a better way to fulfill our calling as Christians in the public arena. We can refuse the game. We can choose to take seriously and follow the

instructions of Old Testament and New Testament:

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

—Exodus 20:16

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors for we are members of one another....Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is useful for building up as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear....Put away from you all bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. —Ephesians 4:25, 29, 31-32 ■

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QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

How can we express our disagreement with the political views of other Christians without vilifying these brothers and sisters in Christ?

What ideological conflicts are discernible among the members of your congregation or community? How are positions usually presented in your town or church? How could they be presented differently?

For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit.

—LUKE 6:43

not agree with me, some suggest, they must be corrupt, evil, misguided, duped, or duplicitous, pretending to be what they are not so as to mislead the unsuspecting. Videotapes, talk shows, direct mail, gossip, jokes, and angry

THE COURAGE TO SPEAK

A vision for the renewal of the black church.

BY EUGENE F. RIVERS III

Each day, 1,118 black teen-agers are victims of violent crime, 1,451 black children are arrested, and 907 teen-age girls get pregnant. A generation of black males is drowning in its own blood in the prison camps we euphemistically call "inner cities." And things are likely to get much worse.

Some 40 years after the beginning of the civil rights movement, younger black Americans are growing up unqualified for gainful employment even as slaves. The result is a state of civil war, with children in violent revolt against the failed secular and religious leadership of the black community.

Consider the dimensions of this failure. A black boy has a 1-in-3,700 chance of getting a Ph.D. in mathematics, engineering, or the physical sciences; a 1-in-766 chance of becoming a lawyer; a 1-in-395 chance of becoming a physician; a 1-in-195 chance of becoming a teacher. But his chances are 1-in-2 of never attending college, even if he graduates from high school; 1-in-9 of using cocaine; 1-in-12 of having gonorrhea; and 1-in-20 of being imprisoned while in his 20s. Only the details are different for his sister.

This crisis poses moral and political questions for a generation of new black church leadership. Perhaps the most important question is, How does the black community directly challenge and mobilize its established leadership, its premier sovereign institution—the black church?

Some things are fairly clear and rarely said publicly, and now must be stated with complete candor. Much of established black church leadership in the United States stands before the world tainted with the blood of millions of black women and children whose pain and suffering have been ignored. (One acknowledges the exceptions.) In many cities it is easier for a homeless black teen-age girl to find sanctuary in a crack house or a bar on a Friday night than it is for her to find refuge behind the locked doors of many established black churches.

With rare exceptions, the black church's pastoral

vision does not speak to the experience of intense alienation of the colonized in the urban metropolitan centers in the country. Its images, symbols, and metaphors do not emanate from a dispassionate understanding of the cold political logic of market society. This failure of church leadership has produced a vacuum into which a more vigorous movement could emerge; currently it is the Nation of Islam, and its bishop is the minister Louis Farrakhan.

Unlike Christian preachers, Nation of Islam ministers, symbols, and metaphors speak to the political experience of those in the bars, cell blocks, and back alleys of blackness. The theological language is the language of

prophetic judgment. The hermeneutic lens through which they interpret the American experience draws upon radically biblical political metaphors.

For them, the black experience in the United States is akin to the Babylonian or Egyptian captivity. In this theological critique, they raise powerful theological questions to the black churches. The Nation of Islam asks, If the God of the Bible calls the people of God to sanctify themselves from a nation of idolaters who worship wealth, power, and things, why was there an exception made in the case of a nation whose founding was based upon genocide, slavery, and imperialism?

What does this mean? Well-known macroeconomic and structural

forces have radically transformed our inner-city neighborhoods, marginalizing increasing numbers of young, black males. Many of these factors were of course driven by the escalating Republican policy wars against the poor over the last 15 years.

These are the central factors that have intensified the spiritual and existential yearning for a massive communal reaffirmation of spiritual and cultural values. And leadership vacuums produce leadership opportunities. An immense vacuum exists, created by the failure of black church leaders to meet the needs of the men even in their congregations.

*By the church's own
silence it has rendered
itself guilty of the
decline in responsible
action, in bravery in the
defense of a course, and
in willingness to suffer
for what is known to be
right. It bears the guilt
of the defection of the
governing authority from
Christ.*

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

IT IS IN THE areas of social policy planning and advocacy that a unique and historic opportunity exists for a new generation of black church leadership to establish a more vital presence in the larger national church policy debates currently raging. There is an interesting irony here. For the last 15 years of the Republican counter-revolution, the domestic policy wars have been directed against the urban black poor. The logic is very simple, with the persistent poverty of the black and brown serving a variety of crucial ideological functions.

Conservative policy elites (Republican or Democratic) perceive, correctly, that poor blacks are a politically disposable population. In fact, the suffering, nihilism, and decay associated with the tragic circumstances of the urban poor can—and, in the view of conservatives, should—be exploited to ensure continued political dominance.

In the midst of these political developments, the leadership of the major black denominations in the United States, and more specifically their academic intelligentsia, were virtually invisible. Despite a burgeoning academic cottage industry called "black theology," there have been no significant pastoral statements issued on any major social policy. This is in stark contrast to the excellent pastoral statements that have been consistently produced by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops over the past 15 years.

A strategically and politically incoherent "pragmatic-integrationist" intelligentsia, with no sustained pedagogical relationship to our most alienated black social classes in the inner city, contributed to the aforementioned growing leadership vacuum. They have produced few powerful new ideas in the areas of politics or policy, and no organizing programs.

What is to be done? We need a radical reformation movement *within* the black church. We need a new vision of black theological practice. Such a vision presupposes that theological reflection must be related to the practical imperatives of social policy formation and execution. We need an expanded definition of black theological education, which is indivisibly connected to advocating for poor black families and children.

What does a radically reformed vision of black theological education mean programmatically? First, the academic and theological preparation of black church leadership must include a thorough understanding of the impact of public policy on the daily lives of their communities. They need to understand the necessity of careful study and advocacy to impact social policy outcomes. One helpful educational strategy is the use of case studies focused on the success experienced by research organizations, acting in collaboration with political activists and strategists, to effect extensive change in a raft of social policies.

The Christian life is but a constant re-beginning, a return to grace every day, sometimes even every hour, through God who, after each failure, pardons so that all things should be made new.

—BROTHER ROGER

At Harvard Divinity School, the Center for the Study of Values and Public Life is establishing, with Jeffrey L. Brown and Alexander D. Hurt of Boston's Ten Point Coalition, a Black Church and Social Policy Seminar. This seminar will sponsor quarterly symposia and study groups with local and national black church leadership that will integrate theological reflection, the study of public norms of justice, and multidisciplinary analyses of the history, theory, and politics of social

policy planning, prescription, and advocacy. Topics to be covered are welfare reform, health care (Medicaid and Medicare), employment policy, and public safety and criminal justice.

Finally, a new generation of black church leadership must develop strategic alliances with the progressive wings of the white evangelical and Roman Catholic traditions to advocate more effectively for policies that benefit the black poor. For example, the Congress of National Black Churches should be closely collaborating with such national leadership groups as the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Call to Renewal on vital matters of domestic and international social policy. Black denominationally affiliated theological centers must integrate into their curriculum every aspect of the policy process—from policy formation to implementation. This is mandatory if the black church is to avoid intellectual and political obsolescence in the 21st century.

As we approach the dawn of a new millennium, new and creative visions are being called forth from the black church. In addition to policy advocacy, black church leadership must advance a new vision for the resurrection of black civil society. They must sponsor the establishment of accountable community-based economic development projects, including land trusts, cooperatives, community development corporations and finance institutions, and micro-enterprise projects, that go beyond "market and state" visions of revenue generation. The black church must now seize the time! ■

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QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Does your church currently issue social statements on policy issues? Do you think that it should?

Can you determine similarities between the tactics of the Nation of Islam and the Christian Coalition? Why is it that these two organizations have struck such a chord in the United States today? How could the issues they address be approached differently?

FAITH IN SEARCH OF A HOME

The lost meaning of "evangelical."

BY TONY CAMPOLO

George Bernard Shaw once said, "God created us in his own image; and we decided to return the favor." The truth of that statement certainly has been born out in recent days. Many politically conservative evangelical Christians have been not too subtly transforming God into a transcendental member of the right wing of the Republican Party. It is not just a matter of their making a biblical case for their political agenda; they seem to be going further than that. They are giving the impression that anyone who disagrees with their agenda is outside the will of God. These people have been so effective in associating evangelical Christianity with right-wing Republicanism that to the secular press the word "evangelical" has come to mean the Christian Coalition.

This recent development has generated great consternation among many of us who, over the last few decades, have used the word "evangelical" to establish our own religious identity. We now have to ask, Can we continue to use that title? We hold to the orthodox theology of evangelicalism, but we are not about to buy into all the values and programs espoused by the Religious Right. We have questions to raise about how much care for the poor, how much justice for the oppressed, how much responsibility for the natural environment, and how much concern for Third World peoples is written into their program for society.

Those of us who used to be able to call ourselves "evangelicals" have been a people theologically akin to fundamentalists. We have believed in the deity of Christ, salvation through his death and resurrection, and in the infallibility of scripture. Where we differed from fundamentalists was that we embraced a host of social concerns that they, in reaction to the "social gospel" of liberal Protestantism, were going to avoid. We also rejected the anti-intellectualism, legalism, and separatist tendencies of fundamentalism. We evangelicals were ready to dialogue with those in secular academia. We did not sense any need to leave mainline denominational churches in order to find communities of faith wherein we could live out our convictions.

We had observed with dismay the ways in which early fundamentalism, which had heroically held the fort against attacks of biblical criticism and theological liberalism, had been gradually transformed into a subculture of petty mores and folkways. And we decided that it had become a subculture from which we wanted a divorce. We focused on ending racism, sexism, militarism, poverty, and political injustices. We defined ourselves as being theologically orthodox but with a progressive social agenda.

NOW ALL OF THAT has changed. Those who once called themselves "fundamentalists" have stolen the "evangelical" label and made it their own. They have adopted our label and given it new meaning. To the theological concerns that had always defined evangelicalism, they added so many right-wing political positions that Newt Gingrich's Contract With America seems like an evangelical manifesto.

Those of us who do not agree with the attitudes and political ideology of these renamed fundamentalists are treated by them as something less than legitimate Christians. We, who

once considered ourselves evangelicals, are being driven out of that camp and rendered ideologically homeless. I say that we are homeless because over the last few years, evangelicals also have become increasingly discontented with some of the radical expressions of Christianity in mainline denominations which appear to be into the rhetoric of some offbeat ideologies.

We who feel homeless have been casting about for a new name to establish our identity. I have heard names like "neo-evangelical" and "classical Christian" suggested. One of my friends has simply chosen to call himself "a follower of Jesus," because he thinks that even the word "Christian" has become tainted with adverse political meanings.

In the face of all this, many of us see a need to establish a new community of faith. If I were asked to summarize quickly the beliefs of this redefined group of Christians, I would lay out the following: 1) We are a

A new organizational paradigm [for the church] is useless and its implementation reverts to former ills unless its foundations rest on the humility of Christ....

—MAGGIE ROSS



people who believe in the doctrines of the Apostles' Creed. 2) We are a people who hold to the infallibility of scripture. 3) We are a people who are committed to the social vision articulated by Martin Luther King Jr. in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Our belief in the Apostles' Creed is an affirmation of those doctrines that have been hammered out by the church and long been the core of what Christians believe. In our commitment to scripture, we uphold that the Old and New Testaments are infallible guides for faith and practice.

And finally, in our declaration of the vision so brilliantly offered by Martin Luther King Jr. in his "I Have a Dream" speech, we set forth our hopes for society. We believe that we must try to break down the barriers that divide us, demolish the oppressive power structures that diminish the humanity of people, and eliminate the grinding poverty that keeps many from believing that they have a future. We are a people who believe in that coming kingdom in which the will of God will be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven.

I am convinced that there are many who have called themselves evangelicals, both inside and outside of mainline denominations, who can resonate to all of this and are ready to stand up and be counted. They are a people who do not simply want to react to the Religious Right nor to the Religious Left. They are looking for a clear-cut alternative. They want a vision for the church

that combines theologically sound evangelism with a bold and dynamic social initiative. They want a Christianity that is viable for the 21st century.

I don't know how many people like this are out there. But then I don't know how many the Religious Right has on its side, either. However, in the days that lie ahead, I'm sure we're going to find out.

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QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Have you ever felt the need to create new terms to describe your spiritual identity because words such as "evangelical" or "Christian" have become co-opted or misused? What is motivating this desire? Do you believe that these terms can be reclaimed?

Do you see a relationship or a contradiction between an orthodox theology and a progressive social agenda?

Consider Campolo's list of beliefs for a "new community of faith." What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses?

Bible Study: Romans 3:21-24

Illustration by Julie Delton

WHOSE KINGDOM?

The blurring lines between Pat Robertson's money and politics.

BY MICHAEL SMITH

It appears that Pat Robertson, 65, may never be king, but he quite possibly will be the kingmaker. The Virginia-based evangelist, television tycoon, and businessman is arguably the single most powerful ex-politician in the nation. Since his flash-in-the-pan presidential bid in 1988, Robertson has concentrated on two agendas: buttressing the finances of his ministry and his personal portfolio, and constructing the most powerful new political movement since the emergence of organized labor two generations ago.

His personal power has become so tenable as to affect directly the agenda of Congress on virtually every issue. He and his movement have also impacted the Republican Party's nomination for president, forcing the suitors of the nomination to conduct a frenzied courtship. Michael Kinsley, then senior editor of *The New Republic*, wrote recently that Robertson "remains the most important person in the most important faction within the Republican Party."

Pat Robertson: Media Tycoon

ROBERTSON OWNS and controls a vast media empire, an operation that is reminiscent of the holdings of the robber barons of the late 19th century. Much like the Vanderbilts and Morgans of old, Robertson has benefited enormously by exploiting loopholes in federal law.

Robertson's kingdom is divided between profit and non-profit, a division that has at times blurred. Critics say Robertson has used the tax-exempt status of his ministry to enrich himself at the expense of his followers and the U.S. taxpayers.

On the non-profit side of this empire is the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), Robertson's three-decade-old television ministry. This \$237 million-a-year television network has been the rock upon which he built his financial kingdom.

The purchase, in 1960, of a Portsmouth, Virginia television station was the genesis of Robertson's career as a televangelist. In the past 35 years, this mustard seed has grown to become one of the mightiest trees in the telecommunications forest. Soon after the purchase of the station, Robertson asked 700 donors to sign a pledge

to support his television ministry, creating his first big success.

The 700 Club, a news-talk and gospel program, is seen by more than 1.5 million viewers daily. Robertson uses the program to promote his views on politics, religion, and society. The program became wildly popular among evangelical Christians, generating tens of millions of dollars in tax-free donations. These donations were then used to fund Robertson's other ambitions, both clerical and secular.

Robertson's brief 1988 presidential campaign nearly crippled his television ministry. While the star attraction was away campaigning, *The 700 Club* lost 56 percent of its viewers and dropped \$70 million in contributions, according to *Esquire*. Upon the demise of his presidential effort, Robertson returned to secure his financial base.

The profit side of Robertson's operation centers on cable television. International Family Entertainment is the holding company that owns The Family Channel in the United States and the United Kingdom; MTM Entertainment, Mary Tyler Moore's programming library; and the Ice Capades, the traveling ice-skating variety show. Robertson also owns Founders Inn, a chain of hotels and convention sites.

Robertson's transfer of The Family Channel, a venue that Robertson founded under the CBN umbrella, has raised questions. The channel's offering of syndicated programs that Robertson deems family friendly soon became very friendly to the Robertson family. The channel became the 10th largest cable television network with almost 60 million subscribers. The success of The Family Channel began to threaten CBN's non-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service, which prohibits for-profit business operations from overshadowing the non-profit parent.

In 1990, Robertson solved this problem by transferring The Family Channel from under CBN's control to International Family Entertainment (ITE), a for-profit entity controlled by Robertson and his son Timothy. It is this transfer that has raised objections from Robertson's detractors. ITE purchased The Family Channel from CBN in a \$250 million deal financed by CBN itself. *Fundraising Management* magazine reported that Robertson and his son Timothy reaped a profit of

*The things that we
love tell us what
we are.*

—THOMAS MERTON



Vicki Kemper

\$95,817,000 when in 1992 the cable TV programming company they control offered shares to the public. The Family Channel stock transaction also allowed "CBN to give Regent University (Robertson's private university with a 1,400 enrollment) a \$117 million endowment, the largest gift ever given to a private school," according to *Christian Century* magazine. *Esquire* quotes *The Virginia-Pilot* as saying CBN's Christian Financial Planning Department has received the commitment of more than \$1 billion in donations from the wills of Robertson's followers.

The Business Coalition for Fair Competition, a national group based in Alexandria, Virginia, "claims businesses bankrolled by Robertson's charity operation tilt the entrepreneurial playing field against those who don't have monthly, tax-exempt contributions to start companies," according to *Religion News Service*.

Critics center on Robertson's theology of capitalism. Robertson bases his mixture of ministry and finance on Jesus' parable from the gospel of Matthew where a master praised a servant for investing wisely, and condemned one who buried his money.

"You should never trust a preacher who has vast wealth," said Dr. James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, when asked about the financial empire of Robertson. "It makes you wonder how Robertson got there in light of the teachings of the New Testament regarding the poor," Dunn added. "Pat Robertson says that the kingdom of God has been advanced by his ministry and that may be so, but there's not any doubt that the kingdom of Pat has been advanced."

The Power of the Christian Coalition

CALLING THE CHRISTIAN COALITION "a mighty army," Pat Robertson opened the annual convention of his six-year-old organization in September 1994. "We are seeing the Christian Coalition rise to where God intends it to be in this nation—as one of the most powerful forces that's ever been in the history of America," Robertson said before the 4,000 assembled members. "The polls are turning. The tide is turning. The nation is saying we're right," Robertson was quoted by the *Chicago Tribune*.

After spending \$22 million, Robertson's brief foray in presidential politics did not come close to garnering him the GOP nomination. He did, however, succeed in building a national network of committed evangelical Christians. These zealous partisans were willing to give both time and money to see a conservative movement impact the decision-making process of the nation. After the campaign, Robertson reorganized his movement and founded the Christian Coalition.

The Coalition has shaken the core of the Republican Party. The organization demonstrated its effectiveness in the 1994 midterm elections, an election where conserv-

ative white evangelicals provided much of the difference that enabled the Republican Party to gain control of both houses of Congress for the first time since 1952. This success at the polls "represents the most thorough penetration of the secular world of American politics by an essentially religious organization in this century," according to a May 1995 profile of the organization by *Time* magazine.

The Coalition has an estimated 1.7 million direct supporters and a \$25 million budget, which is a three-fold increase in supporters and a doubling of the budget in just two years. Robertson plans to quadruple the budget of the Coalition by the year 2000.

Ralph Reed, the 34-year-old executive director of the Coalition,

basks in the glory of the new Republican revolution. Reed serves as the day-to-day strategist for the organization, while Robertson serves as president. Reed is fond of saying that conservative Christians are "too large, too diverse, too significant to be ignored by either major political party." Robertson and Reed's organization is the largest and best organized aspect of what has been termed the Religious Right.

The Coalition does not directly endorse an individual candidate for office because of its non-profit status. If the organization were to endorse candidates it would lose that tax-exempt status. It is rarely difficult, however, to determine which candidate is the recipient of the organization's blessing.

The Coalition is grassroots-based, using local churches as clearinghouses of campaign materials. While the organization remains largely a Protestant entity, on the eve of the 1995 Christian Coalition convention Reed announced the formation of a Catholic offshoot of the Coalition, the Catholic Alliance. The alliance's main role will be the distribution of the Coalition's voter guides in Catholic churches.

Reed has said that the Coalition is going to retake the nation for Christ "one precinct at a time." He refers to their organizing as "flying below radar," because of the stealth nature of much of the activities. Such tactics in last November's elections succeeded in Christian Coalition voter guides being put into the hands of 33 million potential voters.

"The guides and telephone prodding of Christian conservatives on the weekend before the fall election were the final installment on a \$5 million Christian Coalition election effort," according to the *Associated Press*.

Even though the Coalition claims that the organization, or its election guides, do not take sides in an election, Democratic candidates have complained that the guides misrepresent their views. The *Associated Press* cited Democratic candidates from Oklahoma, New Hampshire, and South Carolina who claim they were misrepresented on issues including abortion, the budget, and homosexual rights.

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of one another.

—ROMANS 14:13

Reed has claimed his organization is the major force in the Republican Party of 18 states. He also takes credit for the election of 38 of the 48-seat Republican gain in the House of Representatives, according to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*.

Coalition Blitzes Congress

THE COALITION'S ABILITY to sway elections is well-documented. What is now apparent is the ability of the group to control Congress. Once their machinery is put into motion, the Coalition has almost always prevailed on Capitol Hill. Beginning with the 1991 confirmation fight over the embattled nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Coalition has successfully flooded Capitol Hill with phone calls, faxes, letters, marches, and money to guarantee that its viewpoint is heard.

When the Clinton administration attempted health care reform, the Christian Coalition budgeted \$1.4 million to defeat the plan. The Coalition described the Clinton plan as a "bureaucratic, Byzantine, European-style socialist nightmare."

The Coalition mobilized to help kill lobby reform in the waning days of the 103rd Congress. Robertson called the bill "one of the most shocking attempts to limit your freedom of speech and the rights of Christian people and other groups concerned about the out-of-control government." The Coalition used its "state-of-the-art network of computers, telephone trees, and fax machines" to assist in the measure's demise, according to its own press release.

In 1995 a similar "lobbyist disclosure bill" was stripped of all disclosure requirements for so-called grassroots lobbying. *The Wall Street Journal* calls the exclusion "an enormous loophole—one big enough to drive a multimillion dollar campaign through."

The Christian Coalition is one of the biggest users of grassroots-generation campaigns on behalf of the Republican legislative agenda, spending \$250,000 directly lobbying government officials, according to the *Journal*. Brian Lopina, the Coalition's top lobbyist, said the Coalition spends "several million dollars more [annually] mobilizing conservatives to pressure federal officials," according to the article. This mobilization of the rank-and-file is accomplished through the aforementioned network of fax machines, computer networks, bulk mail, telegrams, and phone banks. "Our troops really come through with letters and phone calls [to Congress]," Lopina said. "They make all the difference in the world," he added.

In January, when House Speaker Newt Gingrich opened the current Congress and began to push through his "Contract With America," he quickly received Reed's pledge that he would "launch the largest single lobbying effort in [the Coalition's] history" to ensure its passage. Reed unleashed his communications network and promised to "spend more than \$1 million" to see the contract become law. He also promised "to publish more than 60 million pieces of literature in the next two years informing people of faith how lawmakers voted on key elements of the contract," according to *The New York Times*.

The Republican Congress is attempting to cut some

\$39 billion in grants for various purposes to 40,000 different non-profit organizations, which conservatives say the groups use to free up funds for lobbying. The *Chicago Tribune* quotes Robertson as terming the bill "the most important piece of legislation in this session." Robertson ally and GOP activist Grover Norquist is quoted as vowing, "We will hunt [these liberal groups] down one by one and extinguish their funding sources."

However, most of the payments in question support specific programs and do not free funds for lobbying, according to the *Tribune*. "If a group gets \$1 million to run a homeless shelter and spends \$1 million to run a homeless shelter, no funds are 'freed' for any purpose. The group has no more money to lobby with than if it had not taken the grant," the *Tribune* editorialized in August 1995.

The Presidential Race

THE RACE for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination has turned into a scramble for the support of conservative Christians. Reed was quoted as saying by *The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer*, "The question is who will jump highest to get that vote."

During the Coalition's 1995 annual convention in September, all candidates for the GOP nomination were invited to speak to the group, with one exception. (The exception was Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, who is pro-choice on abortion and a critic of the Coalition's growing power within the GOP.) Critics termed the parade of presidential hopefuls a "panderfest." Sen. Bob Dole led the way saying, "I read in this morning's papers about how all these candidates were coming down here to court all of you. Well, maybe we are. What's wrong with that?"

SINCE HIS FAILED 1988 attempt at elective office, Robertson has succeeded in positioning himself to benefit from two monumental revolutions, one in telecommunications and the other in politics. He now stands as a giant in both realms.

The televangelist's stamp on America has never been more evident and pervasive. He influences the policies of major organs of the nation's media, politics, and government. This influence is being made possible by hundreds of millions of dollars he collects annually. Unlike the carpenter of Nazareth to whom he claims allegiance, it would be hard for Robertson to say, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). ■

MICHAEL SMITH is the researcher for Bill Moyers Productions-Public Affairs Television and a member of Metro Baptist Church in New York City.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Should Christians be involved in lobbying and elections? Are there other ways to be involved in the political life of the nation?

In the letter to the Romans, Paul cautions Christians not to put a stumbling block before each other. Should Christians be held to higher ethical standards than non-Christians?

Is there a contradiction between being a successful businessperson and being a Christian? Why or why not?

GOD HEARS THE CRY OF THE POOR

A basis for a new politics.

BY JIM WALLIS

*Woe to the legislators of infamous laws,
to those who issue tyrannical decrees,
who refuse justice to the unfortunate
who cheat the poor among my people of their rights,
who make widows their prey
and rob the orphan.*

—Isaiah 10:1-2

While conservatives and liberals argue over who is most to blame for this nation's ills, kids are being shot in the streets. Is it not time to call an ideological cease-fire for the sake of the children?

The social conscience that grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s infused the American spirit with a new sense of political morality. But the liberal conscience has painfully atrophied. Somehow, the liberal solution lost its moral foundations and political imagination and became fatally identified with huge, distant, and impersonal bureaucracies concerned more with control than caring, therefore entrapping the poor instead of empowering them. These are among the old solutions that voters have rejected.

But a dangerous and mean-spirited scapegoating of the poor, an "us and them" politics, has become increasingly popular. The agenda to abandon public responsibility for social welfare, being touted in many conservative circles, is no alternative to those government policies that have failed. While now consistently voting against government expansion, waste, corruption, and intrusion, the American people do not necessarily endorse harsh policies that would forsake the dispossessed.

An alarming depth of cynicism toward politics as usual is tangible in every region of the country. People are literally sick of the politics defined by image, style, hype, spin, money, power, and, most of all, attack. At the same time, one discovers a palpable hunger for a politics of vision, values, integrity, and credible leadership; a longing to recover the moral heart of our public debate.

That hunger for political alternatives is steadily growing among the American people. Most Americans believe that politics is simply not working, especially at the federal level. Many just do not sense that their government is responding either to the moral or economic crises that they feel. Politics doesn't seem to be speaking

to people's values or their anxieties. We are facing both social disintegration and political dysfunction, and that is a dangerous combination.

Today, many people are looking for new political approaches that are community-based, value-centered, and solution-oriented. They want answers more than ideology. The old solutions of the Left and the Right, and the polarized and bitter conflict between liberals and conservatives, seem increasingly irrelevant and distasteful to many people in their own communities.

RECENTLY, A DELEGATION of Republican members of Congress visited a church not far from where I live. Some perhaps had never spoken to a homeless person before or visited the inner city. The pastor gave them an afternoon tour of his church's ministries and of other church-based projects in our area.

The legislators were all very impressed, especially with the after-school programs for children, the housing construction for low-income home buyers, and an array of new community-based economic development initiatives.

"We are really supportive of all these wonderful efforts," one of them exclaimed after the tour was finished.

"No, I don't think you are," answered the pastor politely. Startled, the politicians asked him what he meant. The inner-city minister told them that they had voted against the very tax credits and other funding that helped make these hopeful community gains possible.

"What we opposed goes to support all this?" they asked incredulously.

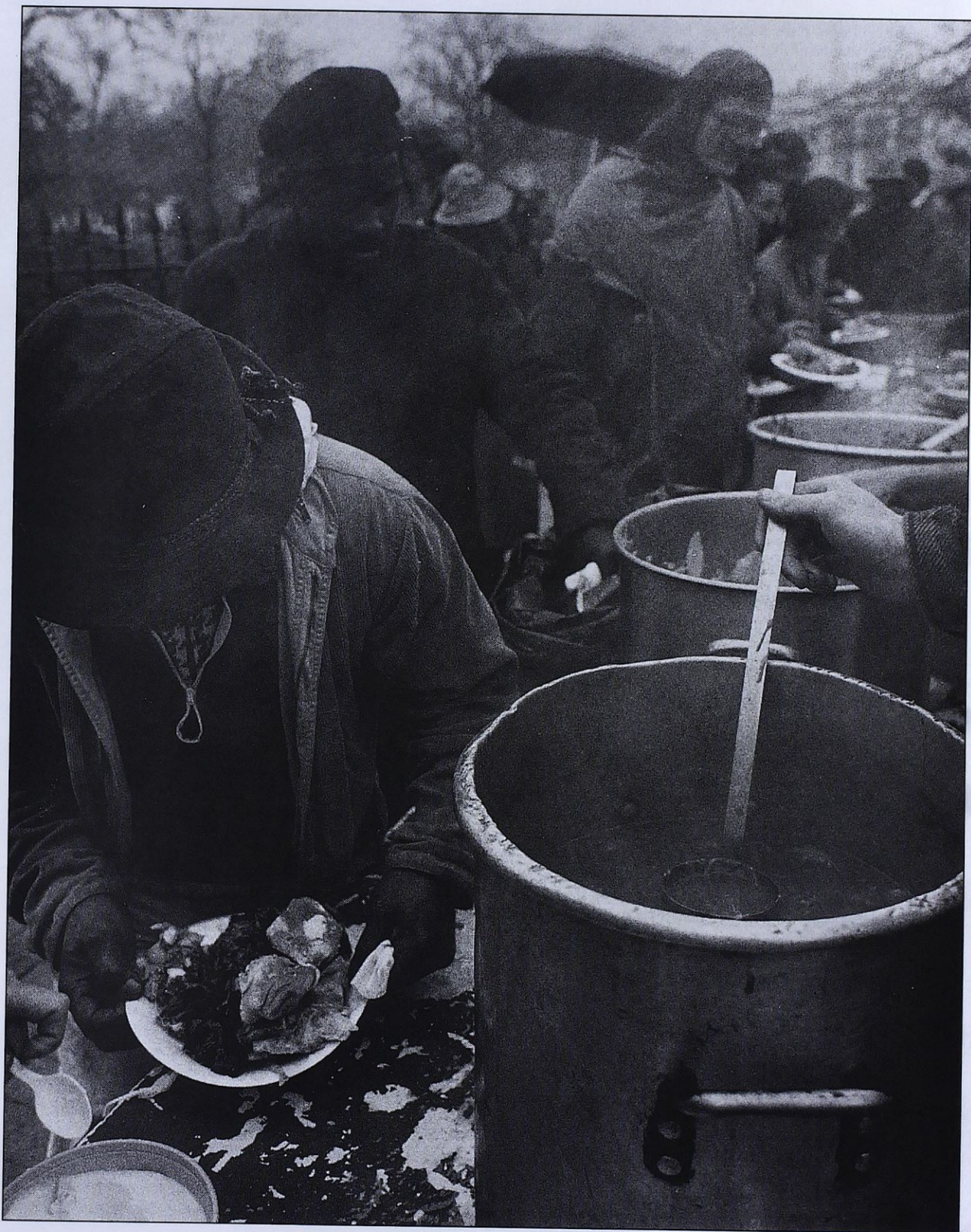
"Absolutely," replied the pastor.

"Well, I guess we had better re-examine our policies then," said one of the Republicans.

"Absolutely," said the preacher.

A policy war between political elites is occurring at the top levels of power in Washington, D.C., and the primary casualties will be poor children who live at the bottom of this society. Republicans and Democrats are locked in a bitter political confrontation in which few are really looking for a way out of the impasse regarding what to do about poverty in America.

The current welfare debate offers a false choice between unsatisfactory alternatives. In order to meet their goals of spending and tax cuts, conservative



Jim Hubbard

Republicans have ended up targeting the poorest and most vulnerable citizens to bear the brunt of deficit reduction.

The Republicans meanwhile have loyally preserved "corporate welfare" to agribusiness and Wall Street, while determinedly cutting resources for poor women and children. Those corporate lobbyists, whom Colin Powell dubbed the "welfare kings on K Street," have all blessed budget proposals that cut and cap everything except their own benefits and entitlements. While McDonald's will get more tax dollars to advertise Chicken McNuggets in Europe, single mothers will somehow have to get by with less, and senior citizens on fixed incomes will have to pay more for their medical care.

The wealthiest Americans, however, will have to get by with more. They will be the biggest beneficiaries of the tax cuts the Republicans are proposing. A budget is a moral document, and the morality of further benefiting the rich while balancing the budget on the backs of the poor, the young, and the old is simply unacceptable from a Christian point of view.

However, for their part the Democrats failed to offer any real alternatives to the present welfare system. Time and time again they refused to reform the system. Large and distant bureaucracies too often created more dependency than opportunity and more wasteful inefficiency than personal and family success.

Meanwhile, the Democrats have mostly defended systems and institutions that haven't won the war on poverty, but still provide them with a political base. Wedded to old approaches and vested constituencies, the Democrats have long been mere defenders of the status quo.

That failure at reform is about to result in a disaster as the Republicans seek simply to dismantle the old while offering nothing new as replacement. Change—fundamental change—is desperately needed in the way that we approach the complex array of issues around poverty: the failures of the welfare system itself; the social disintegration of family and community; the corporate downsizing, loss of jobs, and decline in real wages through a changing global economy; and the assaults upon positive personal and social values in the popular culture. These factors combine to devastate the lives of poor people, especially children.

The need to create approaches and strategies that are community-based, locally focused, value-centered, family-building, job-creating, and solution-oriented is urgent. Neither party seems to have any real vision. These solutions cannot just depend on government programs, which the Democrats have preferred, nor can they simply "dump" the problem onto churches and charities as Republican leaders have suggested. *The New York Times* recently estimated that in order for churches to take up the slack of cut government aid to the poor, each church in America would have to increase its budget by \$250,000 per year.

In contrast to both liberal and conservative approaches, fresh solutions must involve partnerships among non-profit community organizations (both religious

and non-religious), the business sector, private foundations, and government on all levels. In many communities around the country, new projects and partnerships with such vision are already under way.

INSTEAD OF SIMPLY dismantling the welfare state or defending it, new community-based strategies that rely on the leadership of non-profits in the civil society, in partnership with both the public and business sectors, are providing desperately needed alternatives. Instead of simply abandoning affirmative action remedies with no alternative strategies for dealing with the continuing legacy of racism, we could re-tool and update still needed strategies for expanding opportunity, diversity, and fairness in an increasingly pluralistic society.

We will find new answers only in the search for community-based political and economic solutions that really address the root causes of urban disintegration, suburban isolation, and rural decline. In particular, community-based economic development has the capacity to bring together people from across the political spectrum who share a populist preference for empowerment over either liberal control or conservative abandonment.

In Boston, churches have formed a Ten Point Coalition that focuses on rebuilding both fractured families and shattered city blocks. After the killing of a 6-year-old child in Chicago's Cabrini Green housing project, mothers have forged a gang truce by confronting drug dealers with their personal responsibilities.

In California, Barrios Unidos organizers are combining spirituality and community-based economic development, from T-shirts to computers, to end the violence in Latino neighborhoods. In rural Maine, land trusts and housing cooperatives among poor whites offer the beginnings of an American land reform movement.

In a suburban Texas community, a local town meeting of middle-class parents confronted the rapacious consumerism that separates us from each other, poisons the hearts of both our poor and affluent children, and inspires much violence. In Seattle, a mayor planned a "retreat" for local government leaders eager to explore new political options.

Kansas City's Break and Build program has set up "tables" where former gang youth sit down together with religious, civic, and business leaders to construct new strategies and find new resources. The evangelically minded Christian Community Development Association is operating in more than 100 cities to combine rebuilding both lives and communities.

These are more than examples of creative "spiritual ministry" and "community development." They are also signs of the renewal of democracy itself. Ordinary people, especially those who have been on the bottom of society with feelings of both powerlessness and rage, are finding avenues for effective involvement.

Much is at stake. If the old paradigms and programs simply are dismantled and destroyed, we could devolve into great chaos and even more suffering for those whom Jesus called "the least of these." Daniel Patrick Moynihan, perhaps the Senate's leading expert on welfare policy, recently lamented, "Through 11 Presidents

and 31 Congresses, we have tried to help dependent children and never, until now, have we undertaken to do them harm."

Nevertheless, that welfare system is about to change. In too many instances, the weeds of the welfare system have choked out healthy growth toward work, family, and stability. Now the changes are being accomplished by demolition experts instead of gardeners.

But if another vision and paradigm can emerge in the ruins of the old structures, a fresh set of opportunities could result. The responsibility to offer a new voice and to construct different networks and models of community responsibility belongs to all of us.

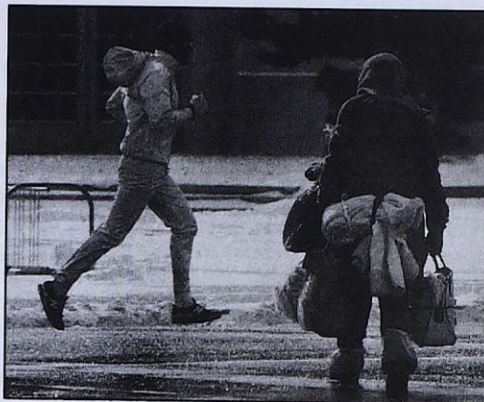
AFTER THE 1992 riots following the first Rodney King verdict, a delegation of international church leaders went to Los Angeles to conduct hearings and listen to community groups around the city. Some of us were able to meet with the Crips and Bloods in Watts, who had just made their first truce. This meeting led to the national Gang Peace Summit in Kansas City the following year.

But another meeting occurred two nights later in a very different kind of community. Simi Valley had been the site of the trial of Rodney King and the place where an all-white jury had acquitted the police officers who were seen brutally beating King on the celebrated video that was shown repeatedly all over the world. Overnight, this sleepy, affluent suburb of Los Angeles became famous and widely regarded as a bastion of upper-middle-class white racism. It was a notoriety not welcomed by the citizens of Simi Valley.

Several of our delegation traveled to the embattled suburb one night to participate in a dialogue that had been set up between a black church and a white church in Simi Valley. Despite the public perception, there are black people in Simi Valley, mostly middle-class professionals like their neighbors. These two churches, while inhabiting the same community, had never met or spoken together before. Nonetheless a substantial conversation ensued.

The pivotal moment in the discussion came when a black mother spoke. "My son is a member of the Los Angeles Police Department," she said, "and I become deeply concerned for his safety when he goes undercover." Across the room, a white woman responded with great sympathy. "I am a mother too, and I know how you must feel. If my son were a policeman and worked undercover, I'd be frightened to death if he had to work with those gangs."

"No, you don't understand," replied the first woman. "When my son takes off that police uniform, he looks like any other young black man in Los Angeles. I'm not afraid of the gangs, I'm afraid of what white Los Angeles police officers might do to him." You could see



the stunned look on the face of the white mother. To think that this mother would fear her son's fellow police officers more than gang members was an absolute shock to her. Nothing in her experience prepared her to hear something like that.

All eyes in the room were on the two women. To her great credit, the white woman *believed* the testimony of the black woman. She was clearly amazed at the story, but she was convinced

the black mother was telling the truth. It was the turning point in the conversation.

More stories followed. African-American businessmen told stories of being dragged out of their expensive cars, accused of being drug dealers, and spread-eagled across their hoods by white police officers. And then white suburbanites shared their fears about driving through black neighborhoods, of being terrified by the riots, and of feeling quite defensive when the media portrayed Simi Valley as a racist enclave.

Real conversation took place that night. People listened to each other and took their neighbors seriously. Even without great class differences in Simi Valley, the utterly different life experiences across the racial divide were evident to everyone in the room. Both sides stated how much they valued this opportunity, and people from each church were appointed to set up more meetings.

We need more than cultural exchanges between different racial communities; we require very focused conversations on race between white people and people of color. To understand how racism has functioned to the impoverishment of us all is critical, if we hope to dismantle the racial structures and attitudes that still shape American life and block our greatest potential as a nation.

Rather than waiting for the politicians to initiate a new conversation on race, the religious community should begin to convene those conversations ourselves. Together, we must get to the place where our racial and cultural diversity is understood not as America's biggest problem but our greatest gift. This would be our best contribution to a world threatened as much by ethnic conflict as by economic confrontation and environmental catastrophe.

Town meetings on race must be well thought out, well resourced, and well facilitated. But the consequences of not talking now are too great to risk, while the rewards and potential of racial justice and reconciliation are too important to miss.

DEEP AND CHALLENGING theological problems are immediately apparent. It is common these days to hear attacks on government. Especially at the federal level, many people feel that political power has become too concentrated, centralized, invasive, and unaccountable.

Jim Hubbard

The sprawling and disconnected bureaucracies that have come to represent the essence of government to many people are met with disdain and fear by growing numbers of citizens. Inefficiency, waste, corruption, and arrogance are all alleged, and often with good reason.

Indeed, from a biblical point of view, there is great reason to suspect and scrutinize concentrations of power—not just politically, but theologically. Human nature being what it is, the biblical prophets constantly warned against such concentrations of power and were especially hard on “the king” who was the embodiment of political power in biblical times. The powerful are always a threat to the powerless, according to the Bible. The king and his court chaplains regularly came under the judgment of God, spoken by the prophets of Yahweh, whose particular concern was the common good and the plight of the poor and oppressed in particular.

Power is not bad, in and of itself, but it must always be held accountable. I get theologically nervous in Washington these days when I hear the perpetual cry against big government, while there’s almost total silence from the same people about the tremendous power of money over the political process. What about the enormous and growing concentration of power in the market economy? When our biggest corporations are bigger and more powerful than most governments in the world today, isn’t it fair to question their influence in the corridors of Congress?

Our biblical tradition says that the poor should have as much clout. In fact, the Hebrew prophets say that a nation’s righteousness is best determined by how it treats the poorest and most vulnerable in its midst. The growing gap between the haves and the have-nots in America is a massive moral and political issue, if we take the Bible seriously. Yet they are almost never central topics of our public discourse.

To attack big government only, and simply to blame the welfare state for the problem of poverty, while virtually ignoring the enormous power of big corporations over the political process and the dislocation and insecurity caused to ordinary people is inconsistent, dishonest, and theologically untenable. If the dysfunctions of the welfare system can be scrutinized, why not the unjust structure of a global economy that continues to remove jobs from American communities? If the economic system is producing greater and greater inequality, how can that not effect the quality of our political democracy? And if the government bureaucrats are going to be challenged to open up the political process, why not the tassel-loafers lobbyists for every corporate and political PAC who are now virtually writing legislation for the members of Congress their contributions have put into office?

The biblical writers spoke often about the king, but they spoke just as often about the landlord, the employer, the judge, the owners of land and property, and those who live in luxury while others endure the heat of oppression. Let’s remember that “oppression” is a biblical word—used by Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—and is clearly meant to describe the injustice of structures and

institutions. Both political and economic institutions come under prophetic interrogation by the prophets of the Bible. It’s time they came under our interrogation too.

NEITHER LIBERAL NOR conservative agendas are empowering the poor, creating community, and building bridges between our society’s warring factions. Neither big government nor big corporations can be relied upon to serve the common good. And neither endless public subsidies nor alleged trickle-down economics will generate real and lasting solutions to endemic social injustice and the collapse of cultural values. In contrast, it will be community-based strategies that combine personal responsibility, family, work, and social justice which have the best chance of success.

In a variety of local communities, diverse people and groups are beginning to come together seeking a politics with spiritual values that transcends the old options of Left and Right. Religious and non-religious alike, pastors and teachers, neighborhood organizers and parents, mayors and former gang members are forging new relationships around needed moral visions that take seriously both personal and social transformation.

The religious community can play a crucial leadership role in getting other groups to the table and offering the necessary moral vision needed to confront the depth of the crisis we now endure. A change in our social and cultural values is as important as marshaling the economic resources and political will to rebuild our disintegrating communities. And that will be a spiritual task.

Indeed, what is most needed is a new, and very old, “politics of community.” Beyond the politics of blame routinely practiced by both the Left and the Right lies the possibility of some new common ground. This is the future that could bring us together. History teaches that we will only find common ground by moving to higher ground. Reaching that new ground must become our most important political task. And it will be the moral test of political leadership in the period just ahead. ■

JIM WALLIS is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners*.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Wallis writes about people’s desire for a new kind of politics that is community-based, values-centered, and solution-oriented. What would a community-based political movement look like in your area? What would be its primary concern? Do you believe that local grassroots initiatives have the power to affect national policy questions? How?

Discuss what might be some of the tools necessary for the “spiritual task” of rebuilding our disintegrating communities. What are some of the skills needed if your church or community is to create common ground among people of diverse backgrounds? What might you do to start this process in your area?

Discuss the role of leadership in the political process. Who gives leaders their power? To whom are they accountable? Does this differ in a religious context?

AN UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

God's unchanging call to heal and to care.

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King asked our nation a prescient, urgent, and timely question: Where do we go from here? Chaos or community? In this post-Cold War era of unbearable dissonance between promise and performance, between good politics and good policy, between America's racial creed and America's racial deed, between professed and practiced family values, between calls for community and rampant individualism and greed, and between our capacity to prevent and alleviate child deprivation and disease and our political will to do so, his question demands our answer with more urgency than ever.

I believe that the overture of our nationhood, the Declaration of Independence, is awaiting its next movement—a movement that is mighty and positive and transforming. A movement which returns us to our founding truths that “All men are created equal” and “are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights,” among them “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The ensuing centuries of struggle to extend these truths to women, racial and other minority groups, and children must continue, especially in this time of national moral confusion, family and community breakdown, economic fear, and political volatility. If we are going to prevent America's dream and future from becoming a nightmare, we must not sign any new political “contracts” before we review our Old and New Testaments and our American covenant.

GOD'S MESSAGE THROUGH the prophet Zechariah “to see that justice is done, to show kindness and mercy to one another, not to oppress widows, orphans, foreigners who live among you, or any one else in need” does not change with political fashion. The gospel's injunction, sent into the world by a poor, homeless child Christians call Savior, to bring good rather than bad news to the poor and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, cannot be overruled by political or media pundits anymore than America's enduring values of fairness and opportunity can. God's call to heal and to care is clear and unchanging.

An American child is abused or neglected every 26 seconds; is born into poverty every half minute; is born to a teen mother every minute; is arrested for a violent crime every five minutes; and is killed by guns every two hours. These shameful numbers have small individual faces and feelings and suffering like that of 8-year-old Gail, who said:

In my neighborhood there is a lot of shooting and

three people got shot. On the next day when I was going to school I saw a little stream of blood on the ground. One day after school me and my mother had to dodge bullets. I was not scared.

There is a church and a school that I go to in my neighborhood. There are robbers that live in my building, they broke into our house twice. There are row-houses in my neighborhood and a man got shot, and he was dead. On another day I saw a boy named Zak get shot....When me and my mother was going to church we could see the fire from the guns being shot in 4414 building. I was not scared....

God is going to come back one day and judge the world. Not just my neighborhood.

I know these are really really bad things, but I have some good things in my neighborhood. Like sometimes my neighborhood is peaceful and quiet and there is no shooting. When me and my mother and some friends go to the lake we have a lot of fun....

I believe in God and I know one day we will be in a gooder place than we are now.

All across our nation, children like Gail are struggling to survive in a living hell, clinging to their faith and their families, and praying that one day they will be in a “gooder” place.

In a decent, democratic, and moral nation, children shouldn't have to pray and wait in fear. I believe that we are called, as people of faith, to be active participants in working to manifest that “gooder place” right here and right now for all of our children.

Can we compose and perform together another great movement of America's unfinished symphony of justice and opportunity? Can you and I act to move our nation back from the brink of violent chaos, racial regression, and class warfare Dr. King warned about? I believe we can.

You and I must and can compose the new movement. We must put social and economic underpinnings beneath the millions of African-American, Asian American, Latino, white, and Native American children left behind when the promise of the civil rights laws and the significant progress of the 1960s and '70s in alleviating poverty were eclipsed by the Vietnam War, economic recession, and changing national leadership priorities.

There was real progress. Some things did and do work despite today's political mythology and simplistic, indiscriminate attacks on all social programs. While it is healthy to sort out what works and does not work, it is

essential to be specific, careful, and to resist policy by slogan. We are playing politics with human lives.

Black infant mortality rates decreased by half during the 1960s and '70s. Providing comprehensive health care to mothers and children, including cost-effective vaccinations and prenatal care, does make a difference. We need to ensure it for everyone, beginning first with universal coverage for children. Black child and family poverty decreased 40 percent, and poverty among the black elderly decreased 20 percent.

Millions of children have begun school ready to learn thanks to Head Start, and tens of thousands of youth got a chance to go to college thanks to targeted government support. In 1994, more than 7,500 black elected officials—nearly five times the number in 1970—now sit in decision-making circles. Dr. King would, and we should, be proud of this.

LET'S BUILD ON THIS foundation of progress and hope, rather than recklessly tearing it down. Let's thoroughly debate any proposals that may increase rather than decrease the gap between black and brown and white and rich and middle-class and poor children in America at a time when 15.7 million poor children lack the basic necessities of life. Let's talk about cutting poverty rather than cutting school lunches, remedial education, Head Start, and vaccinations. Let's prod our great nation to decide that our racial diversity will be its greatest strength rather than its fatal weakness and make our democratic ideals a banner of hope rather than a profile of hypocrisy.

Let's pray that God's Spirit will be born anew within and among us and help us mount a crusade across our land to stop the killing and neglect of children and heal our racial, class, age, and gender divisions. Every American leader, parent, and citizen must personally and collectively commit to reclaim our nation's soul and give our children back their hope, their sense of security, their belief in America's fairness, and their ability to dream about, envisage, and work toward a future that is attainable and real.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is founder and executive director of the Children's Defense Fund, a national children's advocacy organization in Washington, D.C. This article is adapted from a sermon she delivered at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 1995.

CDF coordinates the Black Community Crusade for Children, which has committed itself to "Leave No Child Behind" and to assure every child a healthy, fair, safe, and moral start in life with the support of caring families in nurturing communities. Contact: Children's Defense Fund, 25 E St. NW, Washington DC 20001; (202) 628-8787.

Raising Up Values...

Our children don't need or expect us to be perfect. They do need us to be honest, to admit and correct our mistakes, and to share our struggles about the meanings and responsibilities of parenthood, citizenship, faith, and life.

- If we are not supporting a child we brought into the world as a father or as a mother with attention, time, love, discipline, money, and the teaching of values, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we are using and abusing tobacco, alcohol, cocaine, or other drugs while telling our children not to, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we have guns in our home and rely on them to feel safe and powerful, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we are more worried about our children's earnings than their honesty, about their acceptance than about their achievement, and about their status than their service, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we think it's somebody else's responsibility to teach our children values, respect, good manners, and good work and health habits, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we send rather than take our child to Sunday school and worship services, and believe that the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments, and the Koran pertain only to one day of worship—not to Monday through Sunday home, professional, and political life—then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we or our organizations are spending more money on alcohol and entertainment than on scholarships, books, tutoring, rites of passage, and mentoring programs for youths, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we'd rather talk the talk than walk the walk to the voting booth, school board meetings, political forums, and congregation and community meetings to organize community and political support for our children, then we are a part of the problem and not the solution.
- If our children know more about Dr. Dre than about Dr. Du Bois and are more exposed to obscene music that disrespects our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, and daughters than they are to the inspirational lives of Sojourner Truth and Mary McLeod Bethune, then we are a part of the problem and not the solution.
- If we think we have ours and don't owe any time or money or effort to help those left behind, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.
- If we think being American is about how much we can get rather than how much we can give, and that things and not thought, cash and not character, make the person, then we are a part of the problem rather than the solution.

—MWE

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Do you agree with Marian Wright Edelman that we should not sign any "new political 'contracts' until we review our Old and New Testaments and our American covenant"? How do documents such as the Republican Party's "Contract With America" and the Christian Coalition's "Contract With the American Family" compare with our spiritual and foundational covenants?

How does Gail's experience compare to your previous understanding of inner-city life? How does her experience differ from your memories of childhood? Does the "American covenant" make us especially responsible for protecting and providing for the needs of children? Does the biblical covenant?

How do you respond to Marian Wright Edelman's assessments in "Raising Up Values..."?

WOMEN *and* CHILDREN FIRST

Developing a common agenda to make abortion rare.

BY JULIE POLTER

In a room, a waiting room, sits a woman. She might be married or single, teen-age or middle-age, in the midst of a professional career or receiving government assistance. She might be in a good relationship, in an abusive one, or not in one at all.

She is crying into her hands. Or she is calm and not too worried, ready to do what she feels needs to be done. Or she is numb, just numb. She, whoever she is this time, is pregnant and doesn't want to be. Or wants to be, but feels she can't make it. Or isn't sure what she wants, but knows what her husband or boyfriend wants, or her parents, and she wants to please them.

As people of faith, how do we respond to her?

More than 1.5 million abortions occur in the United States annually, one of the highest abortion rates among developed countries. That number represents a vast number of babies not brought to term and a vast number of unique situations—with different human players, different circumstances, different paths, and different emotional freight.

These individually complex situations take place in the midst of the peculiar social situation of America today: a violent, rending debate over abortion itself. The extremes of the abortion debate are only intensifying a dangerous situation. They might cancel out their opposite extreme, but they add nothing to a solution. The woman sitting in the waiting room and the child who has been conceived both get lost in that maelstrom.

Many people who are pro-life do hold up the life and dignity of the woman as every bit important as saving the child she carries. And President Clinton's statement that abortion should be "safe, legal, and rare" is one that many pro-choice advocates can agree with. If pro-life people know that one abortion is too many and many pro-choice people can at least agree that there surely shouldn't be as many abortions as there are, shouldn't we do what we can within that common territory?

A whole and compassionate approach to reducing the incidence of abortion intertwines that goal with nurturing the life of children and increasing and enhancing the options, dignity, and responsibility of women and



men. This means bringing together the rights and dignity of women with the sanctity of all life. As pro-life lawyer Andrew Puzder puts it, "If you're not in favor of abortion, and you are not in favor of expanding a woman's other choices, what are you in favor of?"

No single approach will reduce the number of abortions. Nor will public policy alone untangle the web of issues. Policy matters, but it is the way that it intersects with values and with real people in individual situations that determines its effectiveness. Still, in the hope of making abortion rare, we

want to look at a range of factors that may contribute to that goal.

NO SINGLE FACTOR leads women to have abortions. The average woman having an abortion gives more than three reasons for doing so, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute. (AGI is a non-profit, pro-choice reproductive health research, policy analysis, and public education organization.)

In AGI polls, three-quarters of the women say a baby would interfere with work, school, or responsibilities; about two-thirds say they cannot afford to have a child; and half say they do not want to be a single parent or they have problems in their relationship to their husband or partner. Other sources rank relationship issues—strain with the baby's father or pressure from the woman's parents—higher.

Poor women are three times more likely than women who are better off to have an abortion, not because they choose abortion more often, but because the rate of unintended pregnancy is much higher in the lowest economic group. Still, 11 percent of abortions are obtained by women with a household income of more than \$50,000.

The natural first step to reduce the incidence of abortion is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. A place to start is among teen-agers, both because they are not prepared for pregnancy and child rearing and they are at a crucial time in their sexual identity.

In her book *Young, Poor, and Pregnant* (Yale University Press, 1993), Judith S. Musick describes how

a variety of factors combine to result in teen-age pregnancy among low-income girls. A primary task of adolescence is to solidify an identity. In many girls' communities, motherhood (without respect to preparation or age) is often one of the few valued and visible identities available.

Other factors further narrow her horizons. Many pregnant teen-agers were initiated into sexuality in preadolescence by older men in their family. Such early abuse teaches a child that she has no control over her body; sex is something that happens to her. Research shows that up to 50 percent of babies born to teen-age girls were fathered by adult men, not other teen-agers.

Adolescent irresponsibility, lack of grounding, and impulsiveness also have a role to play. And the hunger for affection and security, for respect and adulthood, are very deep. Combine these with ignorance and exploitation by adults, and girls will become pregnant.

Teaching abstinence is controversial. Many groups, especially faith-based ones, argue that it should be the only option presented to teen-agers because teaching contraceptive methods and making contraceptives available promotes sexual activity. "You undermine abstinence if you have an attitude that it won't work," says Loretto Wagner, co-founder of two homes for pregnant women in the St. Louis area.

Programs that discuss values and facts openly, but stress abstinence to teens as a way to build a sense of self, to be more empowered in their sexuality, and to achieve long-term academic, relational, and career goals, bring together the best of both worlds. The fight over whether to teach abstinence or contraception can be a distraction, because *both* require information, self-confidence, discipline, and communication skills to have a chance at effectiveness.

Perhaps the need for such information and skills for all adults is underestimated. A survey of 1,000 female college students quoted in *The Washington Post* states that although 85 percent of them are sexually active, almost a quarter had never had a pelvic exam—a vital component of women's health, and an opportunity to learn about the most effective contraception. Fifty-three percent of unplanned pregnancies occur in women who are not using contraception at all. If abstinence is not an adult's choice, then responsible use of contraception methods must be (including the option of natural family planning and methods that also reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted disease, such as condoms).

WHAT ARE REALISTIC options once a woman is pregnant and didn't plan or want to be? What is needed to expand her choices and give her support?

A woman in this situation needs information, including basic biological facts: How does a fetus develop? What are the risks associated with abortion? What are the risks associated with pregnancy and delivery? In order to continue the pregnancy, she will need education on how to care for herself and the developing child.

She will also be seeking resources: Where can she

find emotional support throughout the pregnancy and beyond? Will she be able to pay for prenatal care and delivery costs? If she wants to keep the baby after birth, how will she pay for shelter, food, and clothing? How will she manage schooling or employment once the child arrives? If she doesn't feel able to raise the child, where can she find information on safe, regulated adoption procedures?

What should a woman be *required* to know if she is seeking an abortion? In 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey* didn't overturn *Roe vs. Wade* but did rule that states are free to restrict abortion, as long as they do not place an "undue burden" on a woman. "Informed consent" (mandatory pre-abortion counseling about fetal development, procedural risks, adoption, child support, and abortion alternatives) was deemed allowable under this standard, as was a 24-hour waiting period following counseling.

Pro-choice advocates usually argue that any modifiers to access to abortion, even information requirements, are unnecessary, burdensome, and open to manipulation. But this has to be balanced with a woman's right and ability to make an informed decision.

"Women don't need to be protected by the federal government or Planned Parenthood," argues Serrin Foster, executive director of Feminists for Life of America. "They need to be informed

about their bodies and their options, and empowered to make life-affirming decisions for themselves and their children."

The law in question in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*, the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act, has many other lesser-known provisions. It prohibits coercion by a parent, guardian, spouse, or public official to abort. It regulates facilities, requiring complete reports of resulting injuries and maternal deaths. Abortions for sex selection or after 24 weeks gestational age are prohibited, as is fetal experimentation. And the act prohibits penalties against women who abort. Such legislation, which protects a woman from penalty while giving her protection from both coercion and lack of information about a clinic's record, enhances a woman's ability to make an informed decision.

Crisis pregnancy centers, whether local or part of national organizations such as USA Birthright or Care Net, have for many years provided material aid, counseling, and referrals for women who have unintended pregnancies. While such organizations try to help women get by physically, most also try to offer emotional support and companionship.

Since crisis pregnancy centers are associated with the pro-life movement, many pro-choice people view such centers with suspicion, assuming they will mislead or manipulate women to prevent abortion. But at their best, crisis pregnancy centers simply provide much-needed resources for women who want them.

This is the question for both pro-life or pro-choice adherents: Is everything being done (by myself or my church or community) to provide a place where a preg-

One must always be ready to change sides with justice, that fugitive from the winning camp.

—SIMONE WEIL

nant woman will be respected, supported, accepted, and given the resources and information she needs? Ideally churches, whether staunchly pro-life in doctrine and actions, or a congregation that endorses or has sympathies with a pro-choice position, should be a place where women can find such support.

For women who want to continue their pregnancy, but fear or have experienced rejection by their partner or family, a committed person who accompanies them emotionally through their pregnancy and beyond can make a big difference. In *Real Choices* (Multnomah Books, 1994), a book on alternatives to abortion, Frederica Mathewes-Green writes that the first way to help women continue pregnancies is to be a friend.

CONTINUING A PREGNANCY is one decision. Choosing whether to keep the infant or place it for adoption is another. There are complicated cultural factors involved in adoption. Some racial and ethnic groups have not traditionally embraced it as an option, or are cautious around issues of interracial adoption and cultural integrity because of past exploitation.

But in other cases, ignorance about adoption and no sense of having space to explore options play a part. Mariam Bell, a pro-life participant in the D.C. area Common Ground group, says she has come to realize that "what has been happening at abortion clinics up to this point—being yelled at, pressured—is antithetical to what a woman needs at that time."

As an alternative, and a way to address the lack of information on adoption at clinics, Bell periodically sets up a table near a clinic in Alexandria, Virginia, with information on adoption. She does not approach clients, but simply tries to be a non-threatening, welcoming presence, offering information packets, coffee, and donuts.

Andrew Puzder has been part of a working group on adoption reform issues within the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice. He feels three principles are essential: 1) When a woman chooses adoption, society needs to view that as a loving and self-sacrificing decision, not one she should be disrespected for. 2) The law needs to be changed to protect foster parents (and children) from abrupt removal years after the child is placed. 3) In the adoption process, if the natural father wants to be involved, there should be channels that allow this.

"Adoption is too emotionally straining for some people," Puzder explains. "It's a very difficult decision and should be respected as such. But when a woman chooses this, the law should make it easy."

What about the woman who chooses not to abort and not to put her child up for adoption? Prenatal care, delivery, diapers, food—they all cost money. While cash benefits and other government support aren't the key reasons why poor women get pregnant (despite what some politicians say), they can be key factors in allowing her to choose to continue her pregnancy, keep her child, and find a way out of poverty. As Loretto Wagner

*Every baby born
unloved, unwanted is a
bill that will come due
in 20 years with interest,
an anger that must
find a target, a pain
that will beget pain.*

—MARGE PIERCY

in St. Louis describes it, if we truly want fewer abortions, "we have to make it possible for women to have a baby and live in some sort of dignity."

This is why Wagner, and many, many other individuals and organizations, both pro-life and pro-choice, joined together to fight the 1995 Republican welfare reform plan, the Personal Responsibility Act. The act includes several "child exclusion" provisions that would deny assistance to children born to mothers under 18, children born to mothers currently on

welfare, children born to mothers who previously have been on welfare for two years, and children whose paternity hasn't been legally established.

While reform is needed, this plan has potentially devastating effects. It will serve to punish families and encourage, even coerce, abortions among women in poverty. Organizations working against the legislation include the National Right to Life Committee, Planned Parenthood, the U.S. Catholic Conference, and NOW.

Another factor for many women in the financial viability of keeping their child is child-support enforcement. Despite vast improvements in enforcement during the past 20 years, in 1989 only 37 percent of 10 million custodial mothers received child support.

In response to this, a working group from both pro-life and pro-choice organizations has created a comprehensive child-support reform plan. Its measures include a federalized collection, distribution, and enforcement effort, possibly under the control of the Internal Revenue Service; a more streamlined process for establishing paternity; and outreach and education efforts.

IF THE PERFECT SOLUTION or outcome could be created for each factor contributing to unwanted pregnancies and abortion, abortion probably still wouldn't be eliminated. And ours isn't a perfect world. But as individuals and a society, we still need to engage the issues, seeking the most life-affirming means and outcomes. Otherwise, the violence of act and word that keeps bubbling up—not only abortion itself and shootings at clinics, but the demeaning House welfare reform debate, sexual domination, abuse and neglect of children, dehumanization and subjugation of women—will destroy us. Finding a way to talk together, to build on shared territory, is an act of faith and life. ■

JULIE POLTER is assistant editor of *Sojourners*.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

What does "pro-life" mean to you? Does your church or denomination take a stance on the "consistent life" ethic? What is it?

Abortion has become a political issue that both "extremes" of the political spectrum believe can be "used" to their political benefit. How does each political party use this as a wedge issue in elections? Does this help or hinder the possibility of honest dialogue? Should this topic be de-politicized? How can politicians be held accountable for their rhetoric?

SAYING NO TO BIGOTRY

Christians respond to attacks on gays and lesbians.

BY JIM RICE

During the 1960s, Jesse Helms, then a TV-station executive in Raleigh, North Carolina, delivered nightly editorials decrying the "special rights" sought by participants in the civil rights movement. His opinion, he insisted, had nothing to do with racism; it was simply a matter of opposing "preferential treatment" for blacks.

Echoes of Helms' rhetoric have been heard around the country in the past few years as voters have been asked to approve initiatives designed to strip away legal protection for gay men and lesbians. "Our objective has never been to discriminate," said Will Perkins, head of Colorado for Family Values, the conservative group that sponsored the 1994 ballot measure, Amendment 2. "Our position is that sexual orientation is not an acceptable criterion for special rights."

The Colorado amendment, and others that have followed in its wake, have had nothing to do with "special" rights. The initiatives have sought to disallow laws that ban discrimination based on sexual orientation. Protection from discrimination is not a special right—but special vigilance, as unfortunately has been shown, is required in its defense.

Immediately following the vote, gay and lesbian institutions and individuals reported an outbreak of hate violence, including broken car windows outside gay bars, bomb threats at gay bookstores and community centers, and the firing of gay workers. In all, 23 hate crimes were reported in the two weeks after the election. Gay rights groups fear that the measure will provoke more violent attacks and further discrimination in housing and employment.

Even apart from the threat of violence, initiatives that implicitly question the humanity of segments of the population are disturbing. Glenda Russell, a Denver psychologist, told *The New York Times*, "I don't think the voters understand how painful this is—to be told that you're inferior, a second-class citizen." Lawrence Pacheco, a 23-year-old who two years ago was beaten severely with a brick, said of the vote, "I feel like I've been kicked in the stomach. Do they really hate us that much? I'm a human being, not some kind of deviant."

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT was a key player in the passage of the Colorado amendment (which was later overturned by the courts), and has been centrally involved in similar efforts in other states since then. Colorado for Family Values, Amendment 2's sponsor, is an offshoot of the California-based, anti-gay-rights Traditional

Values Coalition, and includes on its executive and advisory boards representatives of right-wing groups such as Concerned Women for America, the Eagle Forum, Focus on the Family, and Summit Ministries. Members of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition have played an active role in promoting the anti-gay-rights amendments in churches and elsewhere.

While some churches have opposed these ballot initiatives, often their opposition has been half-hearted. Many denominational leaders came out against the Colorado amendment, but the Catholic Church in the state refused to take a position in the wake of a Vatican document released the previous summer that opposed such civil protection for gays. Some individual bishops across the country have courageously and publicly stood in opposition to the Vatican's statement, and in so doing have provided an example for other church leaders to follow.

Regardless of what position churches have taken on other questions concerning gays and lesbians, intolerance and bigotry involve fundamental issues of justice and require forceful and definitive response. Churches have a special responsibility to play an active role in the battle against anti-gay discrimination, both because of the primary role the Religious Right plays and because of the moral, ethical, and even theological nature of the human rights struggle that is at stake.

Churches should take a leadership role in calling for an amendment to the federal Civil Rights Act to include protection for gay men and lesbians, which would invalidate local measures that seek to codify intolerance. People of faith committed to justice should also prepare actively to engage the Religious Right as fundamentalists in other states seek to make a moral and biblical case for discrimination.

JIM RICE is associate editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

A primary argument about the extension of civil rights guarantees to gay and lesbian people is that it is "special protection" for people already protected. Do you believe this is true? Does evidence of hate crimes against gay and lesbian people affect your opinion?

Why has opposition to homosexuality, and not issues like greed or racism, become a cornerstone of some Religious Right groups? What do these organizations say? Who benefits from this rhetoric?

RELIGION IN SCHOOL

What would it mean to be neutral?

BY OLIVER THOMAS

Despite the rhetoric of some preachers and politicians, public schools are beginning to get it right. Religion—once promoted, then ignored altogether—is finally finding its rightful place in public education. A presidential directive by the Clinton administration and some discovery of common ground by the Right and the Left give communities the tools they need to help resolve a decades-old dilemma.

What can Christians reasonably expect from their local schools when it comes to religion? In answering that question, two constitutional principles come into play. The first applies to the government (i.e. public schools); the second to students and parents.

The government's posture toward religion should be one of neutrality among religions and between religion and non-religion. This means Baptists are not favored over Catholics, nor Jews over Muslims. It also means believers are not valued over non-believers. The playing field is level for everybody. That's the key.

Neutrality does not mean ignoring religion or, worse, stripping it from textbooks, school concerts, and other parts of the curriculum. Nor does neutrality mean censoring religious viewpoints. Students should be allowed to express their viewpoints—religious or otherwise—in art projects, classroom discussion, and even in a valedictorian's speech. In a word, neutrality means fairness—letting the voices be heard. Parents have the right to expect schools to be fair, honest brokers, neither promoting nor discouraging religious faith.

Neutrality toward religion should not be confused with neutrality toward values or character development. Schools can and should promote strong moral values. And while they may not invoke religious authority, they should respect and affirm the role that religion plays in the development of moral character for most families.

Above all, teachers should not suggest to students that values are merely a matter of personal choice without reference to absolute truths. Schools must work in partnership with parents to ensure that we do not undermine what the child is being taught at home. Remember, it is parents, not schools, who have the primary constitutional authority to control the religious and educational upbringing of their children.

The second constitutional principle is the government's obligation to protect the rights of students to exercise their religion freely even in a public school.

Students are free to pray alone or in groups, to read their Bibles, and even to proselytize their classmates as long as they are not disruptive and do not harass or coerce others. Of course, teachers and other school employees may not lead, direct, or participate in such student religious activities.

The recently enacted Religious Freedom Restoration Act requires public schools to accommodate the religious needs of students unless there is a compelling reason—such as health and safety—not to do so. Even then, the school must try to accomplish its purpose without restricting one's religion if possible.

THOSE ARE OUR RIGHTS. Now, what about our responsibilities?

As peacemakers, we have a special responsibility to help divided communities find common ground. Often, this can occur when school officials are willing to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and commit themselves to finding ways to treat religion with fairness and respect. This may include teaching about religion in the curriculum, adopting strong programs of character education, implementing an equal access policy for student religious clubs, and working to protect the free speech and free exercise rights of students where possible.

At the same time, parents must admit that the vast majority of teachers and administrators are hard-working public servants who have their students' best interests at heart. Certainly, they are not trying to woo students away from their Christian faith. By listening to each other and working patiently together, we can move from battleground to common ground. ■

Rev. Oliver Thomas serves as special counsel to the National Council of Churches. He is co-author of Finding Common Ground (Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, 1995), is a member of his local board of education, and has worked with more than 300 school districts on issues pertaining to religion.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

Reflect on whether faith can or should enter the supposedly "neutral" public school system. Does this illuminate the larger discussion in this curriculum: How can faith be responsibly discussed in the political arena?

Discuss the issue of "school prayer." Does the public educational system have an obligation to support the religious beliefs of students? Why has this become such a "hot-button" issue in the debate about values today?

THE CRY *for* RENEWAL

Biblical faith and spiritual politics.

A STATEMENT OF THE CALL TO RENEWAL NETWORK

Our times cry out for renewed political vision. And vision depends upon spiritual values. We believe that the language of morality and faith can make a critical contribution to political discourse. The crisis we face is a spiritual crisis and must be responded to by solutions that address the "spirit" of the times that often lies beneath our political and economic problems. We believe further that the old political language and solutions of Right and Left, liberal and conservative are almost completely dysfunctional now and helpless to lead us into a different future. But if politics will be renewed more by moral values than by partisan warfare, the religious community must play a more positive role.

Christian faith must not become another casualty of the culture wars. Indeed, religious communities should be the ones calling for a cease-fire. The ideological polarization of the churches will not contribute to the spiritual discernment of politics the country most needs. Inflamed rhetoric and name calling is no substitute for real and prayerful dialogue between different constituencies with legitimate concerns and a gospel of love which can bring people together.

We are Evangelical voices who seek a biblical approach to politics, not an ideological agenda. We are Catholic voices who assert our own church's social teachings as a vital alternative to both the Left and the Right. We are Orthodox voices who have long stressed the role of spirituality in nurturing culture. We are African-American, Latino, white, Asian, and Native American church voices whose commitment to personal faith and social justice leads us to visions of transformation beyond both political parties. We are voices from all the Protestant churches who feel represented neither by old religious liberalism nor new right fundamentalism.

Together, we proclaim an evangelical, biblical, orthodox, and catholic faith that must address a nation in crisis. We believe that our impoverished political process needs the moral direction and energy that spiritual and religious values can contribute to the public debate. Separation of church and state rightly prevents the official establishment of any religion, but does not and must not prohibit the positive influence of religious communities on the nation's moral and political climate.

Faith and Ideology

THE QUESTION is not whether religious faith should make a political contribution, but how. If religious values are to influence the public square, as we believe they

should, they ought to make our political discourse more honest, moral, civil, and spiritually sensitive, especially to those without the voice and power to be fairly represented.

Recently, the increased influence of religion in politics has too often made our political debate even more divisive, polarized, and less sensitive to the poor and dispossessed.

At stake is not just politics, but the meaning of faith itself. We challenge any political litmus test that distorts the independent moral conscience that faith can bring to politics. We are dismayed by those who would undermine the integrity of religious conviction that does not conform to a narrow ideological agenda. And we are deeply concerned about the subversion of prophetic religion when wealth and power are extolled rather than held accountable, and when the gospel message is turned upside down to bring more comfort to those on the top of society than to those at the bottom.

True biblical faith focuses on the moral values that must be recovered to heal the torn political fabric; ideological faith would rend the fabric further in the pursuit of power. Biblical faith tries to find common ground between warring factions by taking the public discourse to higher ground; ideological faith fuels the rhetoric of "us and them" and breeds a climate for hate and even violence. Biblical faith holds up the virtues of compassion and community; ideological faith appeals to personal and group self-interest. Biblical faith understands our identity as the children of God as a call to humility and reconciliation rather than the basis for attacking those who are less righteous.

Old Options, False Choices, New Directions

CONFORMITY to the old options offered by either the Religious Right or the Religious Left will not take us forward. Both conservative and liberal religion have too often become culturally captive forces that merely cheer on the ideological camps with which they are now identified. But religion as a political cheerleader is inevitably false as religion.

The almost total identification of the Religious Right with the new Republican majority in Washington is a dangerous liaison of religion with political power. With the ascendancy and influence of the Christian Right in party circles, the religious critique of power has been replaced with the religious competition for power.

Likewise, the continuing close identification of religious liberalism with political liberalism and the

Democratic Party has demonstrated a public witness often lacking in moral imagination or prophetic integrity. Liberal religious leaders have sought access and influence with those in power no less than their Religious Right counterparts. Neither right-wing religious nationalism nor left-wing religious lobbying will serve us at this critical historical juncture. Such faith is often more ideological than truly evangelical.

Today, the body politic is buffeted by polarized extremes. Instead of helping a politically war-weary public find common concerns and values, the religious community, on both sides, has often given sanction to the perpetuation of tragic divisions.

We refuse the false choices between personal responsibility or social justice, between good values or good jobs, between strong families or strong neighborhoods, between sexual morality or civil rights for homosexuals, between the sacredness of life or the rights of women, between fighting cultural corrosion or battling racism. We call ourselves and our churches back to a biblical focus that transcends the Left and the Right. We call the Christian community to consider carefully each social and political issue, diligently apply the values of faith, and be willing to break out of traditional political categories. By seeking the biblical virtues of justice and righteousness, the Christian community could help a cynical public find new political ground.

We believe the American people are disgusted with politics as usual and hungry for political vision with spiritual values that transcends the old and failed categories that still imprison public discourse and stifle our creativity. The religious community should help lead that discussion and action toward new political and economic alternatives. We commit ourselves to that task and to dialogue with all sectors of the religious community toward that end.

"The Least Of These"

WE ARE ESPECIALLY concerned with the harsh rhetoric toward the powerless coming from the nation's capitol. It is indeed time to re-examine old solutions that control the poor instead of empowering them. We will join with anyone in the search for new solutions rooted in local communities, moral values, and social responsibility. Many of our congregations and communities are already taking a leadership role in that task. But those Jesus told us to remember especially as "the least of these" must be neither forgotten or scapegoated. To abandon or blame the poor for their oppression and affirm the affluent in their complacency would be a moral and religious failure, and is no alternative to social policies which have not succeeded.

Spiritual Politics

WE WOULD SPEAK another word and offer clear criteria by which to judge morally our nation's political policies.

We serve a God who upholds the dignity and hope of the poor and a Savior who loved the little children. We must save all our children and not punish those who are disadvantaged.

We follow the One who called us to be peacemakers and gave his life to reconcile a broken humanity. We must stop the violence that has overtaken the nation, and address its root causes in the distorted spiritual values

and unjust social structures in which we are all complicit.

We have a faith that invites us to conversion. We must revive the lapsed virtues of personal responsibility and character, and repent for our social sins of racism, sexism, and poverty.

We love a Creator who calls for justice and stewardship. We must begin to judge our economic and environmental habits and policies by their impact on the next generation, rather than just our own.

We are compelled to a lifestyle of service and compassion. We must seek healing from the materialism which has made us less caring and more selfish creatures, isolated us from one another, enshrined the power of money over our political processes, wounded our natural world, and poisoned the hearts of our children—rich and poor alike.

We are led by our faith into community. We must rejuvenate the moral values and political will to rebuild our disintegrating family systems, our shattered neighborhoods, and our divided nation.

Spiritual Renewal

POLITICS CANNOT SOLVE all our problems. Spiritual renewal will be required—of our personal values and communal virtues, of our religious congregations and neighborhood organizations, of our educational institutions and economic enterprises. But genuine spiritual renewal must not be self-righteous or mean-spirited. And spiritual sensitivity must replace ideological predictability as the touchstone of religion in politics.

Our definitions of politics must be widened to include new solutions and leadership. In particular, new community-based and value-centered solutions must be found to our seemingly intractable problems. The wall between "public" and "private" solutions must come down in favor of new partnerships and configurations that involve everyone. And our religious communities must become meeting places and experimentation grounds where those new solutions are shaped and carried out in partnership with other cultural, economic, and political institutions.

New Voices

THE ISSUES of political morality we now confront are too important to be left to only one voice. We testify that there are other visions of faith and politics in the land. New voices are critically needed. We especially appeal to the media to let new voices now be heard. We appeal to the politicians to listen to the voices of religion rather than seeking to manipulate them.

Our commitment is to apply diligently spiritual values to the vexing questions of our public life and, where necessary, to offer a Christian alternative to ideological religion. Let a new dialogue begin at national, regional, and local levels around the country. Let politicized religion be replaced with prophetic faith to forge new coalitions of Christian conscience across the land. ■

This statement, written and endorsed by more than 100 religious leaders, was released by The Call to Renewal: Christians for a New Political Vision, in May 1995. For a list of signatories, contact The Call to Renewal, 2401 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Phone (202) 328-8842. Fax (202) 328-8757.

GETTING BEYOND LABELS

Serpents, doves, and the Religious Right.

BY JIM RICE

Ever since Peter and Paul had opposing views about ministry to the Gentiles, there have been divisions in the Christian church. But rarely in the course of church history have differences among Christians been so exploited and manipulated for political gain by those outside the church as is the case today.

It is true that many Christians have taken an ideological approach to religion. But the proper response to such people isn't to take an opposing ideological position. Rather, it is to encounter them humbly, prayerfully, and firmly rooted in scripture—after all, they are our brothers and sisters in faith.

For while there are indeed consequential disagreements between segments of the church, the bonds that unite us as Christians are stronger than the differences that separate us. It's important to distinguish between Religious Right institutions—some of which are nothing more than right-wing political organizations—and the often well-meaning individuals under their influence.

How should we relate to other Christians associated with the Right? Here are 16 suggestions to get you started.

1. Get beyond the labels and seek to understand others' point of view. Shorthand phrases such as "conservative Christian" lump together people with a wide variety of beliefs, many of which likely resonate with our own. For instance, while "family values" has become an oft-abused right-wing catch phrase, many Christians are legitimately concerned about the evident decline in values in our culture, and seek ways to respond. While we may not always agree on the responses, it's important that we respect and understand the undergirding motivation if we are to have genuine communication.

2. Build relationships across the polarities. It's tempting to take an "us-them" stance toward Christians associated with the Religious Right, but we can't forget that all believers are joined in the

body of Christ, despite political differences. We need to strengthen those bonds and build real community, instead of merely adding to the divisiveness. Remember, each part of the body has its own function—and we need each other to be whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-30).

As relationships grow, genuine communication can follow. A beginning point is to find the common ground between you and articulate it. Don't be afraid to say, "Here's where we agree." Be explicit about the core of our faith that binds us as Christians. Often it almost seems that Christians from different streams of the church speak a different language; try to speak in language that will not be off-putting to your listener.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

—ROMANS 14:10

3. Share the good news. In many ways the gospel of Jesus Christ is very different from the nationalistic and materialistic "gospel" taught by right-wing preachers and politicians (or, for that matter, from the purely social gospel taught by those at

the other end of the spectrum). We have a responsibility to our sisters and brothers in the faith—from all parts of the church—to hear their point of view and to ask what part of their message could improve our life and our faith journey, just as we have a responsibility to testify to our own scriptural understandings. As written in Ephesians, "You must speak the truth to one another, since we are all parts of one another" (4:25). If we honestly seek the truth, we must have confidence that the Spirit will lead us in the right direction.

4. Study the Bible. Become more familiar with the scriptures that form the basis of our beliefs; be prepared to articulate the biblical basis for social and political positions. For some of us, that may mean memorizing the specific texts that back up the broader scriptural themes that are central to our faith. While we rightly steer clear of proof-texting, we all can benefit by deeper immersion in the Word.

When discussing "political" issues with other Christians, focus on the biblical basis of beliefs. Examine the underlying assumptions of positions, and the sources of those assumptions. (For example, are they

cultural and national assumptions, or are they biblical and theological assumptions? Many ideas are based on a little of both, and it's worth sorting it out.)

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.

—INDIRA GANDHI

5. Set up a **dialogue/discussion group** in your congregation to discuss the biblical and theological basis of your positions on various issues. Gathering on a regular basis can help build the trust among members of the group that will enable you to get into honest and frank conversations that can transcend partisanship and narrow categories.

6. **Preach from the pulpit** on so-called social, cultural, and political issues, exploring the wisdom that scripture brings to topics from today's news. Biblical reflection on issues relevant to our lives is the most appropriate sermon material possible, and can help flesh out in real-world ways the very meaning of the gospel. Pastors should explicitly critique theologies whose roots are more ideological than biblical, whether of the Right or of the Left. These aren't merely "political" issues, they're faith and theology issues, and thus belong in the church.

7. **Write letters.** A Sojourners member in Iowa wrote a letter to a Christian bookseller that prominently displayed Rush Limbaugh's *The Way Things Ought to Be*, asking, "How can you claim to be a Christian bookstore and sell that kind of book?" The manager of the bookstore wrote back to say he hadn't considered the question, and that he'd stop selling the book.

8. Don't write off **Christian radio** and other such media as necessarily right wing. While they tend to be wary of (if not antagonistic to) traditional big-government-liberal approaches, they may be surprisingly open to alternative, biblically based viewpoints. In addition, they're licensed to reflect community standards. Write letters to stations (and to the FCC) requesting a diversity of views. Call in to radio shows, and let them know that their audience is broader than one type of listener. Try to get spokespeople on the shows.

9. **Invite a church** that has a political stance differing from your own to join your congregation on a joint project or worship service. Build the relationship. Be prepared to hear from the members of the other congregation about their beliefs, and to share with them the basis of yours. A deeper, richer understanding of the gospel just might emerge.

10. Political groups—from both sides of the spectrum—intentionally seek to exploit our spirituality. Take it seriously! We must be "as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves" in such

matters. Ministers and other church leaders should be aware of and explicitly respond to what people are hearing. Research the "facts" spouted on radio and TV shows; some are bald-faced lies, some are gross distortions, and some are

simply unsubstantiated opinions disguised as facts. Write an article for your denominational newsletter or magazine exposing these demagogues and explaining why Christians ought to be very wary of such polemic.

11. When you do things in the political/public sphere, do them as Christians. To much of the media, the word Christian has become synonymous with right wing. We need to **re-establish "Christian" as a positive word** that connotes caring for the poor, peacemaking, and welcoming the stranger. We should claim the moral authority that's reflected in our country's rich legacy of Christians acting as Christians on behalf of justice and peace, from abolitionists to anti-war activists and from suffragettes to freedom fighters.

12. **Don't be reactive.** Develop your own agenda. Ask yourself, What does my community need? Get beyond the general and the rhetorical to address the specific and practical steps and programs that can begin to address these needs. These pragmatic strategies ought to form the basis of our own "contract" with our community and nation.

13. **Support Christian organizations** that offer an alternative voice to the Religious Right.

14. **Don't give up!** Although it's easy to get discouraged, be hopeful! Keep the faith! Keep fighting! Keep your eyes on the prize!

15. **Pray.** Without ceasing. "Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion" (Ephesians 6:18).

16. **Live your convictions.** Nothing speaks louder than integrity. "You must live your whole life according to the Christ you have received—Jesus the Lord" (Colossians 2:6-7). ■

JIM RICE is associate editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

In what ways, if any, do you feel a sense of spiritual kinship with Christians whose ideology is very different from your own?

Why do you think Christians are able to draw radically different conclusions from the same Bible?

FROM SEEDS TO FOREST

Organizing for a new politics.

BY DUANE SHANK

The Call to Renewal is the beginning of a sustained effort to create a new politics, and a new way of doing politics. The Call is not simply another political organization working in the electoral arena; it is a network that expresses the insights and values of local community efforts.

Our political and organizing vision is grounded in and nurtured by our biblically based faith and our work to heal the wounds of our society. The crisis facing our nation is a spiritual one manifested in social and economic problems. God is calling us to "seek the welfare of the city"—a conviction that transcends traditional conservatism and liberalism.

Many of those involved in local and national Call to Renewal efforts are active in direct community ministries—homeless shelters, soup kitchens, drug abuse programs, urban anti-violence efforts, reconciliation among gang members. They are committed to efforts to strengthen families, rebuild communities, and encourage personal responsibility. In their daily lives and work, they embody a new vision of justice and righteousness.

These efforts, however, have been isolated from each other and have often been ignored by the media. The Religious Right has controlled the public perception of Christians who are involved in politics. In the polarization of Right and Left, Republican and Democrat, our new vision, new ideas, and new proposals have been lost.

As we seek to express that vision, we need first of all to act as individuals to inform and involve ourselves. But most of all, we need to come together—to sustain and learn from each other and to speak out together—to combine our voices to inform the political debates.

What Can One Person Do?

■ Become better informed. This study guide provides resources for understanding the politics and theology of the Religious Right, as well as resources for a new vision of faith and politics. It will be more effective if studied by a group of people—an adult Sunday school class, small group, or Bible study circle. Encourage such groups you are involved in to use this guide.

A variety of other resources are also available:

Evangelicals for Social Action is producing a study guide, the U.S. Catholic Bishops have recently released a guide on "political responsibility," other denominations and religious bodies have resource materials. The more informed we are about the Right and the better able we are to articulate an alternative vision, the more effective we will become.

■ Find other concerned people in your community. Make contacts with the social action committees of local churches, church-based service ministries, active pastors, individuals, and networks you may know from previous activities. Very often one contact will lead to another that will lead to several others and so on. Organizing and networking can grow exponentially.

At this point you've thought about your personal vision of faith and politics; you've studied the Religious Right; you're comfortable articulating an alternative vision; and you've become aware of other individuals and organizations in your community who share that vision. Now it's time to come together as a local coalition.

Coming Together

The national Call to Renewal is supported by a real coalition of Christians—evangelicals, Catholics, African-American church leaders, mainline Protestants, and Orthodox. Our primary organizing objective is to replicate that breadth in local coalitions. We have been isolated from each other for too long; the current situation calls for unity and working together through local networks and coalition building.

Starting a Local Call to Renewal

Once you have identified individuals and groups who wish to work together, call a meeting to form the local group. At this initial meeting, discuss your agreements (and differences) and how you might work together toward the goal of communicating and organizing a new political vision.

The local coalition can function as a community catalyst, a clearinghouse of information, and a coordinator of common efforts. It will require a clear definition of goals, strategy, and division of responsibilities. The

No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do.

—DOROTHY DAY

group can draft a statement of purpose that expresses its reason for coming together.

One objective for the first meeting can be to identify people with interests and skills in the various areas described below, and then have those groups begin to meet and function. Regular general meetings can keep all informed of other activities in order to coordinate the overall effort.

What to Do

At this point, the local Call to Renewal has met, agreed to work together, and identified objectives. What specific activities can it do? Work groups of people should be organized for the following activities.

1. Research and monitor the Religious Right: Some initial research will help in understanding the situation in your community. Is there an active chapter of the Christian Coalition or other conservative faith-based organization? Who are the leaders? What does the group do? Do the media cover the group's activities?

If there is an active group in your area, you might want to attend some of its meetings and get on its mailing list. If you are informed about the message and tactics being used to advance that agenda, you will be better able to put forth the alternative.

2. Community education: An essential part of organizing is communicating the message to the public. This can take a wide variety of forms.

■ **NEWSLETTER:** You may want to produce a regular newsletter fairly soon after coming together. It can announce your activities, have articles on new programs and ideas, recruit new members, and share information. The newsletter doesn't need to be elaborate, and it can be an important vehicle for communication.

■ **PUBLIC SPEAKING:** Many local churches, colleges, and community groups are eager to have speakers for their events. A number of national leaders of the Call to Renewal have extensive traveling and speaking itineraries. Their appearances in your community can be a helpful organizing and recruiting event.

Most local communities have well-known leaders who often don't speak outside their own constituency groups. A public event featuring these resources (e.g. an African-American pastor invited to a Catholic social action meeting, the director of a local homeless shelter invited to the Council of Churches meeting) can build the local network.

■ **PUBLIC FORUMS:** In addition to individual speakers, a public forum can be an educational vehicle to reach the broader community. Forums can take the form of debates, panel discussions, question-and-answer sessions, etc. The key to success is to pick the right location and format to reach the parts of your community you're trying to reach.

A location should be found that matches your intended audience. A forum aimed at college students

and held in a downtown cathedral probably won't work; the student union would be a better choice. Local churches, town halls, community centers, and well-known, accessible auditoriums will increase attendance.

The format and topic of the forum will depend on the organizing goal of your local coalition. A debate between a representative of your coalition and a representative of a Religious Right organization could serve to highlight both the common ground and the differences. A panel discussion, with four or five local pastors and service workers discussing how their ministries are forging new ground in meeting people's needs and the political implications of these programs, could help inform your community of alternatives.

In any format—speaker, debate, panel—a question-and-answer period will help to increase audience participation and involvement. These events are also important opportunities to sign up new supporters, increase the mailing list for a newsletter, and announce future activities or organizing meetings.

3. Working with the media: The most effective way to communicate a new message to the wider public is through the media. Developing media contacts and relationships involves several steps.

■ **RESEARCH AND MONITORING:** Follow your local newspapers, radio and TV news programs, talk shows, and public affairs programming to see who is covering what. Identify those reporters who are covering issues related to religion and politics.

■ **MAKE CONTACT:** Once you have developed a list of reporters, begin to contact them. Make an introductory telephone call to identify yourself and your local coalition, briefly inform them what your activities and plans are, and begin to develop a relationship so they know you are a reliable source of news and information. Keep a record of these contacts for future use.

■ **PRESS RELEASES:** When you have made contact with key reporters, begin to send out press releases on your events and activities. Announce successes of local programs, upcoming events, or the release of reports. A press release should be short and to the point; it should generate interest for more information. Follow up the release by phoning key reporters and editors to see if they received it and if they need any further information.

■ **PRESS CONFERENCES:** A press conference—calling reporters together—should only be called for real news events. The presence of a nationally known speaker or announcing a public action can be used to generate news coverage.

■ **FOLLOW UP:** The most effective way of continuing a relationship with the press is to keep careful track of where you are being covered. Keep clipping files and notes of stories on radio or television. Compliment a reporter for a well-done story, and provide constructive criticism by correcting factual

errors or the slant taken on a story.

■ **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:** In many newspapers, the letters-to-the-editor page is the most widely read page. This open community forum allows individuals to express themselves. Members of your coalition should regularly write letters—to put forth an alternative opinion on something the newspaper covered, to object if they assume that all Christians involved in politics are of the Religious Right, or to compliment the reporter on a good story.

4. Communicating with elected officials. Your coalition may not wish to lobby on specific legislation—many groups are restricted from that due to tax regulations. It is important, however, to establish contact with local elected officials and members of Congress.

Let them know when you think they're doing a good job and you appreciate their efforts, and offer constructive criticism when they're not. Always feel free to express your general concerns—urging that in budget debates the needs of the poor not be forgotten, that legitimate needs of poor and working families be taken into account, that biblical calls to peace and social justice guide their legislative efforts.

Invite elected officials to tour successful community service projects and discuss with the staff the implications of local and national policy decisions on these ministries. Invite officials to speak at forums and participate in debates. The more informed they are with the needs, problems, and successes of their constituencies, the more likely they will be to take those into account in their decision making.

5. Public action: There may be times in the development of your coalition that the situation calls for a public witness or demonstration. This could be a prayer vigil at your congressional representative's office, an outdoor rally around a key issue or event, a procession through your neighborhood or city, a picket line, or sit-in.

For this kind of action, the planning and organization must be very solid. You should check local ordinances and permit requirements and inform law-enforcement agencies of your plans. Peacekeepers who can answer questions and deal with potential problems should be identified with armbands. If the action involves civil disobedience, legal advice and counsel are essential.

You need to pick the timing and nature of any public action carefully, but it can be a visible and important way to make a point.

Conclusion

The Christian Coalition and similar organizations appear to have a large head start—millions of members,

Political Activity and the IRS

Just ask Jerry Falwell or Jimmy Swaggart: Churches that engage in partisan political activity can run into problems with the IRS. Religious organizations, for reasons of conscience, may choose to ignore the tax code's prohibition against "electioneering" by tax-exempt organizations, but the choice should be informed and deliberate—not based upon ignorance or chance.

Churches that wish to avoid problems with the IRS should not endorse (or propose) candidates for public office directly or indirectly; provide financial or other support to a party, political action committee (PAC), or candidate; or display or distribute campaign literature on church property.

The list of prohibited activities can almost be summarized in a single sentence: During an election, you may speak out about the issues but not about parties or candidates.

There are a number of voter-education activities that churches may conduct without jeopardizing their exempt status. Churches may distribute unbiased candidate questionnaires and reports of candidates' voting records, sponsor public forums and debates, and register people to vote. Clergy are free to endorse or oppose candidates as long as they make clear they are not speaking for their churches.

—**Oliver Thomas**

OLIVER THOMAS serves as special counsel to the National Council of Churches.

tens of millions of dollars, television and radio shows. We have a long way to go to match them organizationally.

Yet the combination of individuals and grassroots groups involved in developing the alternative is many times larger. We need to find each other, we need to organize ourselves, and we need to speak together.

Our vision, our message, will sometimes land on rocky ground, but it will also find fertile ground. If we sow the seeds, there will be many who will hear the word and bear fruit.

DUANE SHANK is national organizer at Sojourners, working to organize the Call to Renewal network. For more information contact Call to Renewal: Christians for a New Political Vision, 2401 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009; (202) 328-8842.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

What is keeping you from taking action? Make a list of things that would help you and others get going.

Name three groups of people that you aren't in dialogue with, but with whom you could build coalitions.

How do the media in your community cover religion? Are you happy with this? If not, how might you begin to influence their coverage?

IN THE DIRECTION OF DIGNITY

The principles of moral voting.

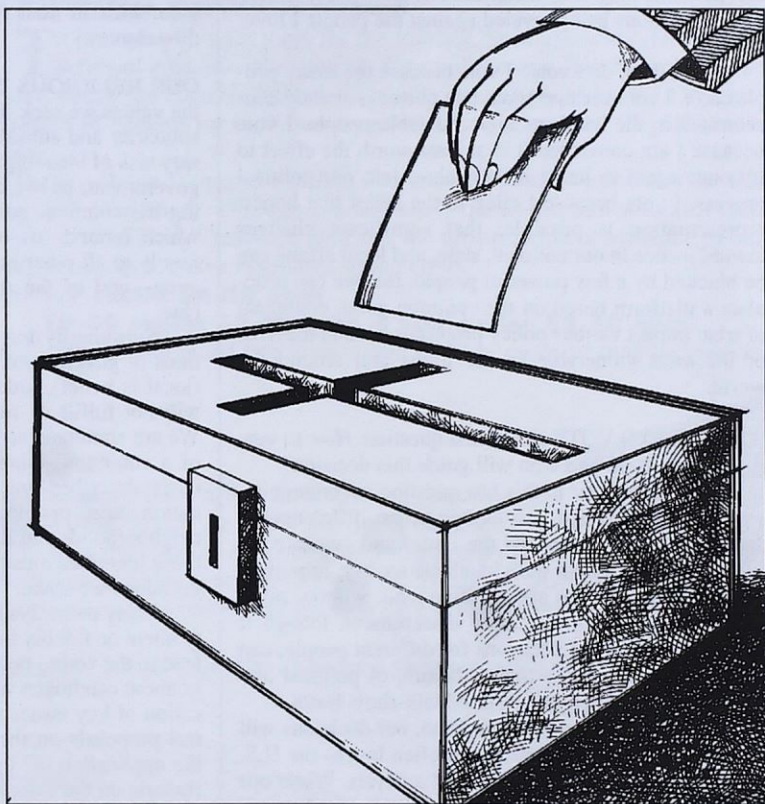
BY MARIE DENNIS

Periodically, the U.S. political scene is subjected to a ritual of readjustment at the hands of eligible and willing voters. Our particular species of democracy rests enormous weight on the electoral process and has regularly made elections the litmus test of a functioning democracy in other countries.

Many of us who are still waiting for this system of representative democracy to birth "liberty and justice for all" recognize the complex layers of reality attached to the voting process. We know very well that, in spite of repeated efforts at campaign reform and attempts at exacting a measure of ethical and social accountability from elected officials, those who run for office almost by definition have to come from among the most privileged in our society, and rarely have life experience in any measure like that of the majority in our land.

We know too the tremendous influence of money before, during, and after election day. While the United States has witnessed little overt fraud in the balloting process, political power here is manipulated and controlled in more subtle and equally effective ways. Some of us harbor a deep skepticism about the capacity of our system to produce elected officials willing to make decisions independent of special interests. Then, why do some people choose to vote?

Perhaps it is an affirmation of the possibility of redemption. Perhaps it is an abiding belief in the fundamental goodness of humanity. Perhaps we are trying to claim whatever measure of value and justice remains in our political tradition. Perhaps it is hope or foolishness or a willingness to risk disappointment once again, or an unwillingness to risk at all.



From time to time, we say, we have heard truth spoken in high places and have seen the consequences. Occasionally our hearts have risen to the witness of a visionary in office. Some of us remember the pain of exclusion from the voting process and the long hard struggle to crack open that door.

Two experiences of my own keep me moving toward the ballot box, however reluctantly:

■ In Haiti (1990) and Mexico (1994) I served as an election observer. In those places, especially in Haiti, I witnessed a people surmount obstacles—illiteracy, distance and impossible transportation, corruption, and threatened violence—to express their opinion. I saw extremely poor people, determined to participate in decisions

that would affect their lives, manage the polling process with amazing fortitude and skill. I saw a jubilant people work their will, even for a time, on the powers that be. I saw the people of Haiti elect Jean Bertrand Aristide to serve as their president...against the will of the United States, brutal security forces, an intransigent and powerful elite, and the church.

■ Here at home, as a resident of Washington, D.C., I have experienced the frustration of having no representation in a Congress bent on abandoning the poor. I have anticipated the impact of dreadful decisions in my own already impoverished neighborhood, a stone's throw from the Capitol and the White House, and had no official power to stay their hand. I am tired of false, vindictive accusations being leveled against the people I love.

Why, then, do I vote? I vote because too many people can't. I vote because too much power is already concentrated in the hands of unaccountable people. I vote because I am convinced it is at least worth the effort to try once again to insert moral values into our political process. I vote because I cling to the belief that honest representation is possible; that significant changes toward justice in our national, state, and local affairs can be blocked by a few powerful people; that we can articulate a platform based on the common good, cognizant of what impact various policy proposals have in the lives of the most vulnerable in our midst and around the world.

WHETHER TO VOTE IS the first question. *How to vote* is the next. What and who will guide this decision?

The first answer to this last question is community, a place for honest dialogue—often across differences—that can help us understand the issues and evaluate the various choices. In our individualistic society, important and complex decisions are too often made without sufficient deliberation. Community discernment, though it may lead to different decisions for different people, can lessen our vulnerability to the rhetoric of political discourse and the harangue of biased talk-show hosts.

Beyond communal conversation, our decisions will be guided by another element too often lost to the U.S. public—serious social and political analysis. While our educational system has often built skills for mathematical, scientific, literary, or linguistic analysis, we are largely ignorant of the processes necessary for social analysis. Yet, as people of the gospel, we are called to faithfulness in this regard.

Every proposal, policy, or political platform should be measured by how it touches the human person; whether it enhances or diminishes human life, human dignity, and human rights; and how it advances the common good.

—from **Political Responsibility:
Reflections on the 1996 Elections**,
by the Administrative Board of the
U.S. Catholic Conference

We cannot support candidates who would exclude

the poor from their rights in our society. We cannot support policies that would further damage the rest of creation. We cannot vote for a platform that perpetuates racism or sexism, that exacerbates the increasing maldistribution of wealth. Before we vote, we must ask fundamental questions about who participates, who holds power, who is the power behind the power, who benefits, who carries the burden. We have to know the issues at stake in our society and look for the proposals that nurture life.

If we believe in social and economic justice; in the fundamental right of all to a dignified life where the personal and the public support and enhance each other; and in the responsibility of the human family to honor the rest of creation, perhaps we can support those candidates who, with all their flaws, will at least move us in that direction.

OUR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS can help us identify the values we seek. For example, the twin principles of solidarity and subsidiarity offer guidance to the necessary task of blending personal and social, communal and government, public and private responsibility for shaping the common good. Solidarity is that characteristic which reminds us of our intrinsic interconnection as family to all other human beings and to the rest of creation—and of the responsibility that creates for their care.

Subsidiarity locates decisions and programs, functions of government, as close to the people as possible (local is better), unless the local community cannot or will not fulfill its responsibility to the common good. We are simultaneously unique individuals and members of a community; important members of families variously described and citizens of a large and powerful nation-state; people profoundly concerned about the neighborhoods and the world in which we live. Each of these identities must be brought to bear on the political decisions we make.

Many pathways are open to the Christian community intent on fidelity in the public arena. One of those may lead to the voting booth. If so, discernment in community about candidates and their proposals, careful identification of key issues and analysis of the impact of various proposals on the most marginal communities, and the application of fundamental life values to probe the rhetoric on the campaign trail may serve us well. ■

MARIE DENNIS is the associate for Latin America in the Maryknoll Justice and Peace Office and a member of Assisi Community in Washington, D.C.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION:

In most elections in the United States today, less than half of eligible voters actually vote. Do you vote? Why or why not?

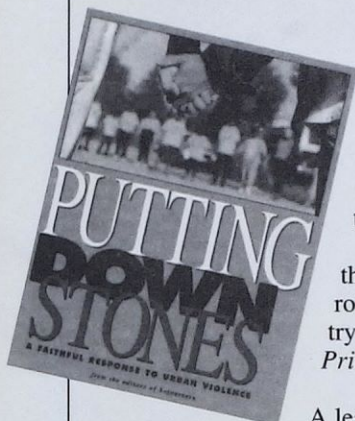
Many people today aren't politically active because they feel disempowered or apathetic, they find themselves too busy working and supporting a family, or they don't feel well-informed on issues. What kind of programs could be set up to encourage these people or to make political action more accessible?

What are your criteria for selecting candidates?

From the editors of *Sojourners*:

RESOURCES

for Renewal and Change



PUTTING DOWN STONES

To provide you with tools for the journey, Sojourners is offering a new series of educational resources for small groups, Sunday schools, and adult education classes—anywhere people are hungry to learn. The curriculum consists of packets for each participant and a separate leader's guide for each topic.

Putting Down Stones: A Faithful Response to Urban Violence is the first of these to be published. Through articles, study questions, and activities such as role plays, the 52-page resource analyzes the proliferation of violence in our country and examines creative responses to the crisis.

Prices: **1-9 copies \$4.50 each**

10-49 copies \$3.50 each • 50+ copies \$2.50 each

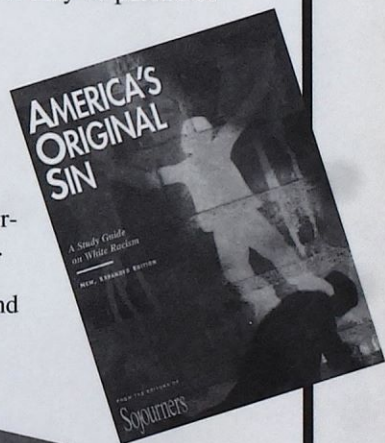
A leader's guide is included free with orders of 10 or more, or may be purchased separately for \$10.

AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SIN

Confronting racism has become an issue of life or death for this nation. *America's Original Sin: A Study Guide on White Racism* is designed to help us all deal more deeply with the issue of racism. This 180-page resource is divided into nine chapters and provides practical suggestions for action, information about national organizations, and books and resources for further study.

Price: **\$10 each.**

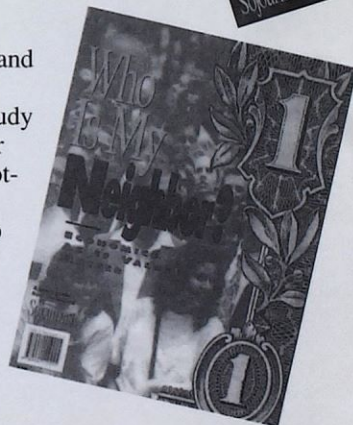
Leader's Organizing Packet: 10 study guides, discussion group manual, and audiocassettes. **\$95.**



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